

**FROM COMMANDER TO COMMANDANT: THE TRANSFORMATION  
OF BRITISH MAJOR GENERAL JAMES PATTISON DURING THE  
AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, 1777 - 1780**

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Abstract  
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From Commander to Commandant: The Transformation of  
British Major General James Pattison During the  
American War of Independence, 1777 – 1780  
(Under the direction of Wayne E. Lee)

This thesis examines the unique position of a garrison commandant responsible for a city with a substantial civilian population within the British Army and its role in the larger war for America by examining the dual tenures of Major General James Pattison as Commandant of the Royal Artillery in North America between September 24, 1777 and September 4, 1780 and Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York from July 5, 1779 to August 13, 1780. Pattison's hybrid civil-military responsibilities as the commandant of New York City convinced him that effective governance was essential to mobilizing Loyalist support and provided him with an opportunity to demonstrate the military potential of Loyalists in the middle colonies.

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## Introduction

I am fully of opinion that all the efforts Great Britain can make will never effectually conquer this great continent, in which, notwithstanding all that has been said of friends to Government [Loyalists] here, and friends to Government there, yet there is scarcely one to be met with from one end of it to the other.

Brigadier General James Pattison to his brother, December 1777  
Commandant [Commander] of the Royal Artillery in North America

We already learn that the recent Display of Loyalty here [New York City], with the great Acquisition of Force it produced, has had its Effects upon the Friends of Government without the Lines, as well as upon the Enemy.

Major General James Pattison to Lord George Germain, February 22, 1780  
Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York

This thesis seeks to understand the unique position of a garrison commandant responsible for a city with a substantial civilian population within the British Army and its role in the larger war for America by examining the dual tenures of Major General James Pattison as Commandant of the Royal Artillery in North America between September 24, 1777 and September 4, 1780 and Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York from July 5, 1779 to August 13, 1780.<sup>1</sup> As the garrison commandant, Pattison was a “middle manager” tasked with translating the strategic guidance of Britain’s Colonial Office and their military superiors into executable plans.<sup>2</sup> He functioned as an

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<sup>1</sup>British officials used the terms commandant and commander interchangeably. This paper will distinguish the position of leadership for a military organization as “commander,” while commandant will refer to the civil-military position associated with the occupation of New York City.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Kennedy, “History from the Middle: The Case of the Second World War,” *Journal of Military History* 74, no. 1 (2010): 35-36.

indispensible negotiator between the British Army Headquarters, which was located in New York City throughout most of the occupation, and the civilians who forfeited their customary English liberties under martial law in exchange for the safety of the garrison.<sup>3</sup> The commandants' hybrid civil-military position demanded that Pattison delicately balance the needs of the army with the burdens that meeting those needs imposed upon the city's inhabitants. He perpetually squared the short-term gains to military readiness by requisitioning food, wagons, horses, billets, and firewood against the long-term consequences of alienating the local populace.<sup>4</sup> This suggests the commandant's unique requirements and responsibilities helped shape Pattison's ability to mobilize the military potential of the city's populace. Well before his fellow officers Pattison realized that victory in America required both battlefield success and effective governance; therefore, he crafted policies that were designed to conciliate the civilian population within the city. Pattison's tenure represented the apex of relations between the British forces stationed within New York City and the local populace as demonstrated by the unprecedented mobilization of nearly 6,000 Loyalist troops during the winter of 1779/1780.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Frederick Bernays Wiener, *Civilians under Military Justice: The British Practice since 1689, Especially in North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 95-107 for the exercise of martial law in New York City during the British occupation. For Commandant James Robertson's efforts to reinstate civil government as the newly appointed Governor of New York see James Robertson, *The Twilight of British Rule in Revolutionary America: The New York Letter Book of General James Robertson, 1780-1783*, ed. Ronald W. Howard and Milton M. Klein (Cooperstown, NY: New York State Historical Association, 1983) (cited hereafter as *Twilight of British Rule*).

<sup>4</sup> For city inhabitants' reactions to the occupation see Thomas Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, ed. Edward F. De Lancey, 2 vols., *Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, Inc., 1968); Ewald Gustav Schaukirk, "Occupation of New York City by the British," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 10, no. 4 (1887); William Smith, *Historical Memoirs ... Of William Smith*, ed. William Henry Waldo Sabine (New York: New York Times, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, *The Twilight of British Rule*, 106.

Examining Pattison's experiences in North America provides a lens into three key aspects of the American War of Independence. First, through him, one gains a clearer picture of the relatively unstudied problem of British military policy towards urban areas during the war. Although there are a number of monographs that examine British Army units in cities prior to the outbreak of hostilities, and some that chronicle the occupation of America's major cities during the war, none examines the question from a British Army institutional perspective.<sup>6</sup> Second, Pattison's responsibilities as both the Commandant of the Royal Artillery and the Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York demonstrate how competing institutional goals shaped the implementation of policy within the colonies. Third, his success in raising Loyalist militia belies the notion that the British strategy to use Loyalists in Britain's pacification efforts was quixotic, and

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the prewar tensions and Americans' alienation from the British Empire see John W. Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965); Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Douglas Edward Leach, *Roots of Conflict: British Armed Forces and Colonial Americans, 1677-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Fred. Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); and Richard Archer, *As If an Enemy's Country: The British Occupation of Boston and the Origins of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). For conditions in occupied cities prior to and during the American Revolution see Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); Jacqueline Barbara Carr, *After the Siege: A Social History of Boston 1775-1800* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005); George Smith McCowen, *The British Occupation of Charleston, 1780-82* (Columbia: Published for the South Carolina Tricentennial Commission by the University of South Carolina Press, 1972); Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For New York City during the British occupation see Oscar Theodore Barck Jr., *New York City During the War for Independence: With Special Reference to the Period of British Occupation*, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law; No. 357 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931); Wilbur Cortez Abbott, *New York in the American Revolution* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1929); Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Father Knickerbocker Rebels: New York City During the Revolution* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1948); Barnet Schecter, *The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution* (New York: Walker & Co., 2002); Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); and Phillip Papas, *That Ever Loyal Island: Staten Island and the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

provides an important corrective to the common view that the British only made large-scale efforts to raise Loyalist militia as part of their “southern strategy.”<sup>7</sup>

As commandant, Pattison was placed in the unique position of being beholden to two separate chains of command because the job of garrison commandant was an additional duty. Pattison’s primary military duty, from his arrival in New York in 1777 until he departed in 1780, was commander of the Royal Artillery in America. In this capacity he was expected to lead the Royal Artillery on campaign when the main British Army took the field. He was also required to maintain the Royal Artillery’s combat readiness by overseeing all of the logistical, disciplinary, and personnel issues for the units stationed in North America. In this capacity he reported to the Board of Ordnance. Pattison’s main military responsibility as commandant, on the other hand, was securing New York City and its surrounding environs – Manhattan, Staten Island, Long Island, and Paulus Hook - from both external and internal threats.

The threats were numerous and varied. So-called whaleboat wars, named for the vessels employed, posed the most common external threat and resulted in endemic amphibious raiding against Britain’s island strongholds. Despite the frequency of these attacks, they never represented a serious challenge to Britain’s position in New York. After France’s official entry into the war in 1778, however, there were a number of instances when the French fleet appeared in American waters and threatened to blockade New York while the Continental Army simultaneously laid siege to the city. Although a joint Franco-American amphibious assault against the city never took place, it remained

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Hubert Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats: A Study in British Revolutionary Policy* (Chapel Hill,: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., 1964); Wallace Brown, *The Good Americans; the Loyalists in the American Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1969); Robert M. Calhoun, *The Loyalists in Revolutionary America, 1760-1781* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).



the greatest military danger after 1778, a danger of which Pattison had to remain wary. Internal threats, meanwhile, largely came from spies and saboteurs. Two days after the British seized the city a conflagration broke out that consumed nearly 600 buildings. Although there are conflicting accounts of how the inferno started, the most reliable ones attribute it to Patriot arsonists.<sup>8</sup> Pattison became commandant well after that event, but it clearly remained a concern as evidenced by Pattison's regulations regarding the storage of "combustible naval stores," the fines imposed on inhabitants who did not regularly sweep their chimneys, or his approval of a lottery to raise funds for fire buckets.<sup>9</sup>

Pattison did not have a free hand in executing his assigned tasks of running the Royal Artillery and defending New York City. The organizational hierarchy and administrative peculiarities of the British Army and Royal Artillery placed constraints upon his options. However, the ambiguity of British conceptions regarding the proper role of a commandant provided Pattison with room to exercise his own initiative. These two structural dynamics shaped Pattison's experience and explain his unmatched success in raising Loyalist militia within New York City.

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<sup>8</sup>Benjamin L. Carp, "The Night the Yankees Burned Broadway: The New York City Fire of 1776," *Early American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2006): 471-511.

<sup>9</sup>Carson I. Ritchie, "A New York Diary of the Revolutionary War," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1966), 431. Pattison issued an order to remove all turpentine, tar, resin etc. to a communal spot to prevent fire on July 27, 1779, but it was not published until the following week on August 3, 1779 in *The New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*; The James Pattison Papers, 1777-1781, November 12, 1778, microfilm. Pattison reissued Lieutenant General Daniel Jones's order that all chimneys be swept once every four weeks and that fire resulting from neglect would carry a £5 fine; *The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, July 10, 1780, 4. Pattison authorized a lottery expected to raise \$3,600 for the purchase of fire buckets.

## Structure of the British Army and Royal Artillery

Britain's decisive victory over France and Spain during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) made it the preeminent European imperial power. Despite the unparalleled success of British arms and numerous reform initiatives in the wake of its victory, by the beginning of the American War of Independence Britain's military establishment remained a bloated, bureaucratic labyrinth that lacked centralized control. Thomas Hutchinson, the former Royal Governor of Massachusetts, commented in 1776 that the inability of the numerous government agencies, both civil and military, to coordinate their activities "shows the want of one great director to keep every part of the operations of government constantly in his head."<sup>10</sup>

Theoretically all military authority at this time derived from King George III (r. 1760-1820), but Parliament's increasing presence in the administration of government created a de facto dual chain of command, one operational and the other administrative. The constitutional settlement of the Glorious Revolution of 1688/1689 planted the seeds of this dual command structure. Parliament's passage of the Mutiny Act gave King William III the power to discipline disobedient troops by extending the jurisdiction of military justice to peacetime.<sup>11</sup> The new act also limited the size of the standing army. Parliament did this by annually appropriating just enough funding to cover the number of

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 20 (hereafter cited as *War for America*).

<sup>11</sup> H. C. B. Rogers, *The British Army of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1977), 39.

troops they had approved.<sup>12</sup> Parliament sought to prevent a military dictatorship by reining in Royal Prerogative while simultaneously expanding its own powers.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to its annual control of army funding, Parliament also divided responsibilities within the military in a way that served to restrain the potential power of any one element. Parliament separated the combat forces into the British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Artillery. Although this functional division was logical, it was inefficient because it created massive duplication of effort among the services with each developing its own support agencies instead of relying on consolidated ones. Three distinct government agencies supplied the armed forces and four more governmental departments were responsible for transporting those supplies. The Treasury supplied both provisions and equipment to the British Army, the Navy Board was responsible for building and outfitting ships, while the Board of Ordnance issued weapons to both services. A fourth agency, the Royal Navy's Victualing Board, provided foodstuffs to the fleets. All of these departments independently contracted shipping which led to frequent competition over merchant vessels to transport supplies.<sup>14</sup>

The military forces were further broken down along geographical lines by the existence of the Irish and English establishments within the army and numerous fleets throughout the world. The British Army also created regional commands in Britain's colonial possessions. When Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton took command of the war effort in America he inherited the title of, "Our General and Commander-in-Chief of

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<sup>12</sup>Edward Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 33 (hereafter cited as *Organization of the British Army*).

<sup>13</sup> Royal Prerogative refers to the customary powers and privileges intrinsic to the royal sovereign, king or queen, within a monarchical government.

<sup>14</sup>Mackesy, *War for America*, 16.

Our Forces in Our Colonies in North America lying on the Atlantic Ocean, from Nova Scotia on the North to West Florida on the South, both inclusive.”<sup>15</sup>

Most important for operational control, however, was the geographic delineation of authority for the Secretaries of State. The Secretary of State for the Northern Department dealt with matters concerning the predominantly Protestant continental powers of Europe, while the Secretary of State for the Southern Department concerned himself with issues throughout the Mediterranean basin. As one of their post-war reforms, in 1768 the British created a new position, the Secretary of State for America and the West Indies, to oversee affairs in the western hemisphere.<sup>16</sup>

The Cabinet and the Secretaries of State were the two most important offices in the operational chain-of-command for Britain’s ponderous war machine, with the former responsible for planning and the latter tasked with carrying out the Cabinet’s plans. Sir Charles Middleton, the Tory Member of Parliament (MP) for Rochester, summed up their respective duties thusly:

Cabinet. To consider and determine what expeditions are to take place, and at what periods; what troops are likely to be sent abroad, when, where, how, and the number. What services are to have preference.  
Secretary of State. To issue timely orders, to the Treasury, Admiralty, Ordnance, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army on these heads, so that every necessary preparation can be made, and no delay nor disappointment happen when the services take place.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> King George III to CINC [Commander-in-Chief], March 19, 1778, Sir Henry Clinton Papers, Volume 32:20, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>16</sup>David Ascoli, *A Companion to the British Army, 1660-1983* (London: Harrap, 1983), 298.

<sup>17</sup>Quoted in Mackesy, *The War for America*, 12. Between 1775 and 1783 the Cabinet consisted of the following nine positions: First Lord of the Treasury, three Secretaries of States (Northern Department, Southern Department, and American Colonies), First Lord of the Admiralty, Commander-in-Chief, Lord President of the Council, Lord Privy Seal, Lord Chancellor, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Master-General of the Ordnance, and Lord Steward of the Household.

All of these officials, whether Cabinet members or Secretaries of State, were simultaneously MPs in either the House of Commons or the House of Lords. This plurality of office holding extended to military leaders, many of whom were MPs, and some of whom served in the Cabinet as well.<sup>18</sup> In theory the King made strategic decisions based on the advice of his Privy Council and his senior military officials. This strategic guidance was forwarded to the remainder of the Cabinet where it was translated into generalized campaign plans. The Cabinet then communicated its plans to the respective Secretaries of State to coordinate among the affected governmental departments and manage the innumerable problems that arose. Secretaries of State in general and Lord George Germain, the American Secretary from 1775 to 1782, in particular, sent orders directly to military commanders operating in the theaters under their jurisdiction. The inclusion of the Secretaries of State in the Cabinet gave them influence over both the planning and execution phases of campaigns which provided the sole source of continuity for Britain's military operations.

The army's administrative chain-of-command also began with the monarch. However, common practice dictated that His Majesty delegate his military authority to a Commander-in-Chief with the rank of Captain General to provide administrative oversight.<sup>19</sup> This post was vacant at the beginning of the American War of Independence and was not filled until 1778 when open war with France prompted George III to appoint Sir Jeffrey Amherst. Despite becoming the highest-ranking officer in the British Army, Amherst could not issue any orders to the commanders in America as his authority was

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<sup>18</sup> Conspicuous British military leaders during the American Revolution who held seats in Parliament included generals William Howe, John Burgoyne, Henry Clinton, and Charles Cornwallis as well as Admiral Richard Howe.

<sup>19</sup> The rank of Captain General is usually shortened to General.

geographically limited to England, Scotland, and Wales.<sup>20</sup> The absence of a Commander-in-Chief during the first three years of the war greatly enhanced the powers of the War Office headed by the sitting Secretary at War William Wildman Shute Barrington, 2<sup>nd</sup> Viscount Barrington, because Barrington had to assume many of the Commander-in-Chief's duties to meet wartime exigencies. Viscount Barrington not only drafted the articles of war and published the army lists, but he also issued all orders pertaining to finance to the paymaster general. Furthermore, he approved all organizational changes to the army and personnel actions, maintained all service records, and supervised all military hospitals, courts-martial, and mercenaries in British service. His authority, like that of the Commander-in-Chief, was limited geographically to England, Scotland, and Wales and functionally to the horse and foot regiments because the artillery and engineers fell under the Master-General of the Ordnance.<sup>21</sup>

The Royal Artillery, which consisted of both artillerymen and engineers, was born on July 15, 1683 when Orders in Council established the organization and created the position of Master Gunner. The Master Gunner commanded sixty-three artillerymen and was responsible for keeping a register of his forces and providing them with instruction in shooting. In 1702 the Duke of Marlborough altered the position of Master Gunner by renaming it the Master-General of the Ordnance and placing it at the head of a Board of Ordnance. The Board of Ordnance was a five-member body consisting of a lieutenant general, surveyor-general, clerk of the ordnance, keeper of the stores, and clerk of the deliveries. Unlike the other positions on the Board of Ordnance, the Lieutenant General was a purely military appointment devoid of any associated Parliamentary political

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<sup>20</sup>Rogers, *The British Army of the Eighteenth Century*, 34.

<sup>21</sup>Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 34-35.

office, yet a prestigious one at that. The Lieutenant General served as the Master-General's deputy, and during periods when the British Army's Commander-in-Chief posting sat vacant, the Lieutenant General of the Ordnance became the highest professional post an army officer could hold.<sup>22</sup> The Royal Artillery was initially a civilian department whose officers did not receive military commissions. This changed with a royal warrant in 1742 that created the first Royal Regiment of Artillery consisting of six companies. By 1751 the officers received commissions with rank commensurate to that of the British Army.

Thus in some ways a "junior service," dominated by the line regiments of the army, the Royal Artillery nevertheless set a standard of professionalism among its officer corps unmatched by the British Army in general. Lieutenant General James Pattison's career exemplifies both its distinctiveness and its blending into the army. Pattison joined the Royal Regiment of Artillery in 1740 at the age of seventeen. The Royal Artillery's policy of commissioning officers based on technical competence instead of selling commissions to the highest bidder greatly increased the size of its recruiting pool by opening it to the middle class. Not surprisingly, this permitted it to be more selective, thus increasing the quality of recruits. From 1741, when the Royal Military Academy was founded at Woolwich, all officers received a professional education in mathematics and fortification techniques. Pattison was, therefore, part of the first generation of trained artillery officers. Matching his technical competence, Pattison demonstrated an acute political acumen when he married one of Colonel Albert Borgard's daughters. Colonel Borgard had established the Royal Artillery and served as its first commander. Pattison first went on campaign in Ghent, Belgium during 1742 and saw further action during the

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<sup>22</sup>Rogers, *The British Army of the Eighteenth Century*, 36.

Seven Years' War in Portugal. Based on his wartime record the Royal Artillery selected him to organize Venice's artillery in 1769. Although Pattison advanced steadily through the ranks due to his connections and skill, it took him thirty-seven years to gain command of a regiment. He finally achieved this milestone in 1777 when he assumed command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion upon the death of Colonel Ord.<sup>23</sup>

The regimental system was the organizational bedrock of the British military during the eighteenth century. The terms regiment and battalion were synonymous during the American War of Independence because the infantry numerically dominated the British Army and that branch only assigned one battalion to each regiment with the exception of the 1st and 60th Regiments which both had two battalions. The regiment was technically the administrative side of the organization while the battalion was the tactical one. The typical English infantry regiment/battalion consisted of 477 men in ten companies. Eight of the companies were "battalion companies" composed of regular infantrymen. There were also two elite "flank companies," one of grenadiers and the other light infantry. The Royal Artillery's structure differed from the infantry given its unique mission and requirements. There was only one Royal Artillery Regiment, but it had four large battalions attached to it. Each Royal Artillery Battalion consisted of eight companies prior to 1779, and ten companies thereafter for a total strength of 928 and 1160 men respectively.<sup>24</sup> Artillery companies were twice as large as infantry companies because of the manpower-intensive nature of transporting and manning the cannons.

By assuming command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Royal Artillery Battalion Pattison secured a revenue generating post and a position of patronage, while firmly establishing himself

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<sup>23</sup>I.F. Burton, "James Pattison (C. 1723-1805)," *The James Pattison Papers, 1777-1781*, microfilm.

<sup>24</sup>Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 4-7.



within the military hierarchy. While the British military bureaucracy treated regiments as their commanders' personal property, the bureaucracy exercised oversight through financial and reputational incentives. The King did not sell regimental colonels their commissions. These were bestowed upon them for free as a way of harnessing the political influence of notable subjects to help raise troops. This system tapped the regimental colonels' political and financial resources because although Parliament appropriated funds to raise the new regiment they were seldom adequate to cover all the costs of recruiting and equipping the men. The colonel had to cover the difference.<sup>25</sup> One way that the regimental colonel recouped his initial outlays was by selling the commissions for all of the officer positions in his regiment upon its creation. However, the regimental colonel only got paid for the initial commission. Once purchased, the commissions, ranging from Lieutenant Colonel to Ensign, became the personal property of their officers who were free to sell them to their successors. Unlike infantry regimental commanders, who could sell commissions within their regiment that cost anywhere from £400 for an ensigncy to £6,700 for a lieutenant colonelcy in the infantry and cavalry, artillery commanders could not offset the costs of creating a new battalion with the fees paid for the officers' commissions.<sup>26</sup> Fortunately for Pattison, since the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion was already in existence, he did not have to absorb the normal start-up costs.

Despite these peculiarities, regimental command could still be a profitable venture, as it was for Pattison.<sup>27</sup> The fiduciary benefits derived from keeping the unit up

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<sup>25</sup> Rogers, *The British Army of the Eighteenth Century*, 45.

<sup>26</sup> Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 160.

<sup>27</sup> Most infantry and cavalry regiments only had one battalion while some had two, but the Royal Artillery Regiment had four battalions.

to its full strength and efficiently managing the soldiers' pay. The colonel's annual salary of £803 was his only guaranteed income during peacetime, but wartime service offered pay as a general and opportunities to skim a little extra from the war chests.<sup>28</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion had eight companies assigned to it for a total authorized strength of 928 men when Pattison took command.<sup>29</sup> Pattison, like all colonels, received payment from the treasury for all of the soldiers and civilian wagon drivers he documented on his muster rolls. Payment for the troops came in two forms: subsistence and gross off-reckoning pay. Of the privates' daily wages of eight pence, six pence went to subsistence pay and the other two pence to gross off-reckoning pay. Subsistence pay covered provisions and officers often diverted it to cover other miscellaneous expenses such as clothing and weapons repair. The off-reckoning pay contributed to the Chelsea Hospital fund and the regimental agent who handled the finances. Whatever was left over was known as the "net off-reckonings" which was supposed to go towards soldiers' clothing, but frequently served as a slush fund for the battalion commander. The British Treasury also permitted military units to keep six empty placeholders on their muster roles to compensate the colonel for the clothing lost to deserters and provide a recruitment fund.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 159.

<sup>29</sup>Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 6. In 1779, Parliament authorized artillery battalions to increase by two more companies, for a total strength of 1160 men. However, this reform was not implemented in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion until after the American War of Independence.

<sup>30</sup>Rogers, *The British Army of the Eighteenth Century*, 46; Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 22-24. During the American Revolution £1 = 20 shillings and 1 shilling = 12 pence. The average soldier technically made £12, 3 shillings, 4 pence during the year but saw precious little of that money.

## Commandants: Their Myriad Meanings and Duties

Until the summer of 1779 Pattison's experiences in America had been defined by his role in the Royal Artillery and the various campaigns he participated in, most notably the occupation of Philadelphia on September 26, 1777 and the capture of Stony Point on the night of May 31/June 1, 1779. Shortly thereafter, on July 5, 1779, Clinton tapped him to assume the role of commandant of New York City. In his new position as commandant, Pattison assumed complex and sometimes contradictory responsibilities. The term commandant usually denoted a commander of a military unit or a location. The commandants who commanded cities with substantial civilian populations were sometimes referred to as governors. They functioned as "mid-level managers of war" who were responsible for translating strategic guidance from multiple military and civilian superiors into policies and executable orders.<sup>31</sup>

French and British eighteenth-century military treatises clearly demonstrate the conceptual developments associated with the roles and functions of commandants. Historian Ira Gruber's investigation of what books British officers of the Revolutionary era owned or referenced revealed a lively professional interest in technical military treatises, with a special interest (after the 1740s) in those produced by French authors. Particularly popular were: Lieutenant General Feuquières's *Memoirs* (1737), Marshal Turenne's *Military Memoirs and Maxims* (1744), Marshal Saxe's *Reveries; or Memoirs*

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<sup>31</sup>Paul Kennedy, "History from the Middle: The Case of the Second World War," *Journal of Military History* 74, no. 1 (2010): 1.

*Concerning the Art of War* (1759), and Turpin de Crissé's *An Essay on the Art of War* (1761).<sup>32</sup>

By the time of the American Revolution British military treatises generically defined the word commandant as “that person who has the command of a garrison, fort, castle, regiment, company, &c.”<sup>33</sup> The term was used interchangeably with the word commander in military organizations of the time. Turpin de Crissé's *An Essay on the Art of War* used commandant in lieu of commander throughout the text referring, for example, to the “commandant of escort,” “commandant of the detachment,” and “commandant of the guard.”<sup>34</sup> While Saxe also used the term in this fashion citing “commandants of battalions,” he distinguished between commanders in charge of military units and those responsible for a fortress calling the latter “commandant of the citadel.”<sup>35</sup> In *The Military Guide for Young Officers* (1776), Englishman Thomas Simes quoted the Duke of Cumberland's regulations that used the term “Commandant of a

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<sup>32</sup>Ira D. Gruber, *Books and the British Army in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill and Washington, D.C.): University of North Carolina Press; Copublished with the Society of the Cincinnati, 2010), 279. Gruber looked at the libraries of 42 British officers to identify the works that they considered authoritative. They appeared in 268 editions and seven languages, so the publication dates above correlate to the most popular English editions.

<sup>33</sup>Capt. George Smith, *An Universal Military Dictionary, a Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms &c. Used in the Equipment, Machinery, Movements, and Military Operations of an Army* (London: J. Millan, 1779).

<sup>34</sup>Turpin de Crissé, *An Essay on the Art of War* trans., Captain Joseph Otway, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: A. Hamilton, 1761), 170, 196; Turpin de Crissé, *An Essay on the Art of War*, trans., Captain Joseph Otway, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: A. Hamilton, 1761), 31 (hereafter cited as *Essay on the Art of War*).

<sup>35</sup>Maurice Saxe, comte de, *Reveries, or, Memoirs Concerning the Art of War. By Maurice Count De Saxe, Marshal-General of the Armies of France. To Which Is Annexed, His Treatise Concerning Legions; or, a Plan for New-Modelling the French Armies. Illustrated with Copper-Plates. Together with Letters on Various Military Subjects, Wrote by the Marshal to Several Eminent Persons; and, the Author's Reflections on the Propagation of the Human Species. Translated from the French. To Which Is Prefixed an Account of the Life of the Author.* (Edinburgh: Sands, Donaldson, Murray, and Cochran. For Alexander Donaldson, at Pope's Head, MDCCLIX [1759]. ) (cited hereafter as *Reveries, or, Memoirs Concerning the Art of War*).

town.”<sup>36</sup> Finally, Major Robert Donkin’s *Military Collections and Remarks* (1777) also used the word commandant interchangeably with commander.<sup>37</sup>

Vagaries of terminology aside, it was clear that the “commandant” of a city, among other things, was first and foremost the commander of that city’s garrison. Whatever power he had to control the city’s population and enforce his edicts depended on the men in his garrison. Captain George Smith’s *Universal Military Dictionary* succinctly explained a garrison as:

...a body of forces, disposed in a fortress or garrison town, to defend it against the enemy, or to keep the inhabitants in subjection; or even to be subsisted during the winter season: hence garrison and winter-quarters are sometimes used indifferently, for the same thing; and sometimes they denote different things. In the latter case, a garrison is a place wherein forces are maintained to secure it, and where they keep regular guard, as a frontier town, a citadel, castle, tower, &c. The garrison should always be stronger than the townsmen.<sup>38</sup>

Smith thus asserted that the primary responsibilities of the garrison commandant were to defend the fortified location against attacks by the enemy, to control the civilian population, and to protect the army’s magazines.<sup>39</sup> This definition of a garrison and its functions remained nearly identical to the one Feuquière advanced forty years before.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Thomas Simes, *The Military Guide for the Young Officer, Containing a System of the Art of War; Parade, Camp, Field Duty; Manoeuvres, Standing and General Orders; Warrants, Regulations, Returns; Tables, Forms, Extracts from Military Acts; Battles, Sieges, Forts, Ports, Military Dictionary, &c. With Twenty-Five Maps and Copper Plates. By Thomas Simes, Esq. Aothor of the Military Medley. The Second Edition, with the Addition of the Regulations of H.R.H. The Late Duke of Cumberland, &c. In Germany and Scotland.* (London: J. Millen, 1776). 60 (cited hereafter as *Military Guide for the Young Officer*).

<sup>37</sup>Robert Donkin, "Military Collections and Remarks. [Three Lines from Tortenson] Published by Major Donkin.," (New-York: H. Gaine, M,DCC,LXX,VII. [1777]), 235, 249, 253.

<sup>38</sup>Smith. *Universal Military Dictionary*, s.v. "Garrison." Other pertinent definitions from Smith: *Winter-quarters* signifies a place where a number of forces are laid up in the winter season, without keeping the regular guard. *Garrison-town*, generally a strong place in which troops are quartered, and do duty, for the security thereof, keeping strong guards at each port, and a man-guard in or near the market-place.

<sup>39</sup>Smith, *Universal Military Dictionary*, s.v. "Magazine." A place in which stores are kept, or arms, ammunition, provisions, &c. Every fortified town ought to be furnished with a large magazine, which

Generally speaking officers of the *ancien régime* were both apprehensive and contemptuous of having civilians in their midst during wartime. They feared that the city's inhabitants would either undermine the city's defenses through treachery or provide intelligence to a besieging army. Feuquière recounted a siege from 1672 when the inhabitants of the Bavarian city of Groll forced the garrison to surrender by setting the city ablaze when the attackers began their assault.<sup>41</sup> Turenne likewise noted resistance from civilian populations. He attributed it to their fickle nature, writing "The populace, who are easily raised into a rebellion, and little addicted to like the best rulers," therefore it was necessary to build a citadel within the city, not to defend against external attack, but rather "to hinder the inhabitants from revolting against the garrison, who may not be safe among a numerous and ill-disposed people."<sup>42</sup> Turpin de Crissé warned, "the inhabitants are always to be feared, as they are naturally more attached to their old sovereigns than their conquerors," while Donkin emphasized the populace's ability to act a fifth column.<sup>43</sup>

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should contain stores of all kinds, sufficient to enable the garrison and inhabitants to hold out a long siege, and in which smiths, carpenters, wheelwrights, &c. may be employed in making every thing belonging to the artillery, as carriages, wagons, &c.

<sup>40</sup>Marquis Feuquière, *Memoirs of the Late Marquis De Feuquiere, Lieutenant General of the French Army. Written for the Instruction of His Son. Being an Account of All the Wars in Europe, from the Year 1672, to the Year 1710. In Which Is Given a Curious Relation of the Sieges Undertaken, and Battles Fought, in That Period of Time.*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (London: Printed for T. WOODWARD, at the HalfMoon in Fleet-street. and C. DAVIS. In Pater-noster Row. , MDCCXXXVII). Glossary, GAL – GAT (cited hereafter as *Memoirs of Feuquiere*).

<sup>41</sup> Feuquière, *Memoirs of Feuquiere*, 266.

<sup>42</sup> Major-General A.I. Williamson, *Military Memoirs and Maxims of Marshal Turenne Interspersed with Others, Taken from the Best Authors, and Observation, with Remarks* (London: Printed for J. and P. Knapton, at the Crown in Ludgate-Street, 1744), 108 (cited hereafter as *Memoirs of Marshal Turenne*).

<sup>43</sup>Crissé, *Essay on the Art of War*, 4; Donkin, 263.

All of the military authors noted the potential role city dwellers could play regarding intelligence. While most of them stressed the danger clandestine activity would pose to the garrison, some viewed it as an opportunity to learn about or deceive their enemies. Turpin de Crissé recommended going into the surrounding countryside and rounding up “principal inhabitants, if they can secure them by means of whom he will be able, to gain information of the enemy, whether he is in detachment or in full force, whether he has been at the village and by what road he marches.”<sup>44</sup>

The presence of a large civilian population made these military garrison commanders institutionally unique because they had to perform both military and civil functions. The hybrid civil-military character of their positions divided military opinion on what to call them. The French most often referred to them as governors while the British alternated between governor and commandant. Feuquièrre defined a governor as,

a very considerable Officer, and has a great Trust reposed in him, and ought to be very vigilant and brave. His Charge is to order the Guards, the Rounds, and the *Patrouilles*, to give every Night the Orders and the Word, after the gates are shut, to visit the Posts, to see that both Officers and Soldiers do their Duties, and to send frequently Parties abroad for Intelligence, and to raise Contribution.<sup>45</sup>

This definition focused almost exclusively on military duties and epitomized what Feuquièrre was thinking when he discussed a “Governour of the Citadel.”<sup>46</sup> Turenne advised that the town and the citadel should have two separate governors and that the military governor should be independent of the civil one.<sup>47</sup> The French writers agreed

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<sup>44</sup> Crissé, *Essay on the Art of War*, 40.

<sup>45</sup> Feuquièrre, *Memoirs of Feuquiere*, Appendix, GOR – GRE.

<sup>46</sup> Feuquiere, *Memoirs of Feuquiere*, 343.

<sup>47</sup> Williamson, *Memoirs of Marshal Turenne*, 108.

that the governor's responsibilities included the security of the post and the care and discipline of the garrison. However, they disagreed, on how the governor should treat the inhabitants. Turenne advocated a policy of fear, writing: "You let them all know, that if they meditate a revolt, you'll set fire to the four corners of the town, and cut off every man of them."<sup>48</sup> Turpin de Crissé, writing a generation later, on the other hand, recommended kind treatment for the city's inhabitants and stressed the need to discipline the soldiers to prevent abuses amongst the civilian population.

If the mid-century French authors conveyed mixed messages, the British military texts of the 1770s clearly distinguished between civil governors and military commandants despite the similarities of their defensive responsibilities during hostilities. Civil governors were theoretically the ultimate authority in their towns because "a commission of Governor creates him [the governor], in a manner, Captain-general in his own town" similar to the military authority that the King held over the entire nation. In reality, however, disputes often broke out between civil governors and military commandants over the extent of one another's authorities because military commanders often held equivalent or superior rank to local governors.<sup>49</sup> One way to solve this problem was to spell out the respective jurisdictions of these officials, but that seldom occurred in practice. Donkin argued that the weakness of civil governors encouraged the spread of the rebellion during the American War of Independence and strongly advocated for military governors who could immediately address local disturbances. British military authors at this time also widely endorsed the benevolent treatment of civilians

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<sup>48</sup> Williamson, *Memoirs of Marshal Turenne*, 132.

<sup>49</sup> Simes, *Military Guide for the Young Officer*, 106.



because "generous behaviour will so gain the hearts of the country people."<sup>50</sup> Donkin's views are particularly important because two of James Pattison's close associates in the Royal Artillery, General Samuel Cleaveland and Captain Stephen Payne Adye, received copies of *Military Collections and Remarks*.<sup>51</sup> Although we can never be sure of exactly what Pattison read, these ideas were clearly common currency in the service at the time, and would have been known in some form to Pattison and likely influenced his tenure as Commandant of New York City starting in July 1779.

## Commandant of the Royal Artillery in North America

When Pattison first left England for America in 1777, he took with him a commission for the local rank of brigadier general, the duty title of Commandant of the Royal Artillery in North America, his 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion headquarters staff, and a substantial reinforcement of artillery.<sup>52</sup> Pattison's responsibilities as the senior officer of the Royal Artillery were twofold: first, administratively he was to manage the force to maintain its combat readiness. This required paying nearly interminable attention to matters

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<sup>50</sup>Donkin, *Military Collections and Remarks*, 229.; Young, *Maneuvers, or Practical Observations on the Art of War* quotes the following order from Major Wolfe at Stirling dated February 12, 1748: "The soldiers are to avoid all kind of disputes with the inhabitants; and if at any time there should happen any tumult or riot, they are by no means to mix with the people of the town, or to be concerned with them. The officer of the guard is to order a detachment to seize any men who disobey these orders, and to make them prisoners; and the serjeants and corporals are required to prevent so much as depends upon them all quarrels and disturbances. It is likewise ordered there be not the least subject of complaint in any of the quarters."

<sup>51</sup>Donkin, *Military Collections and Remarks*, listed under subscribers. General Cleaveland served as the Commandant of the Royal Artillery in America prior to Pattison's arrival. Captain Adye served with Pattison in Portugal and became his aide during the War of Independence.

<sup>52</sup> Sir Henry Clinton promoted Pattison to Major General on January 26, 1780, but backdated the promotion effective date to May 20, 1777 for seniority purposes. In Pattison's title of "Commandant of the Royal Artillery in America," the term commandant is synonymous with "commander."

including personnel, supply, and pay, and thus making him beholden to the Master-General and the Board of Ordnance. Second, he was to support the local Commander-in-Chief by commanding the Royal Artillery in the field during maneuvers by the whole army, or sending out detachments as appropriate for small scale operations and geographically isolated independent commands.

Brigadier General Pattison's major administrative challenge was the transcontinental scope of his responsibilities. During his tenure in North America he supervised twelve companies from three different Royal Artillery battalions. These units were stationed along a nearly 1,500-mile expanse of territory running from Pensacola along the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian stronghold of Quebec on the Saint Lawrence River.<sup>53</sup> Although eighteenth-century officers expected difficulties with their supply lines which would lead to occasional shortages, Pattison, the British Army, and the Royal Navy were all incensed by the shortages of artillery pieces and gunpowder in America. Although the three organizations seldom agreed, they all concurred that the Board of Ordnance bore culpability and castigated the agency as "obnoxious and obstructive" for its lackadaisical response to their requisitions.<sup>54</sup> The Board of Ordnance's failure to deliver cannons and gunpowder frequently forced Pattison to redistribute gunpowder and weapons among the garrisons in North America to prevent any one of his posts from becoming defenseless. When the Royal Artillery company commander at Halifax, Captain Anthony Farrington, requested more gunpowder in December 1778 and January 1779 without any other justification than "being in a great want of Powder" Pattison

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<sup>53</sup> Duncan, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, 1:244. All eight companies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion served in America during Pattison's tenure. The 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion and the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Companies of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion were also present.

<sup>54</sup> Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 41.

sprang into action despite his vexation. He discovered from Halifax's Ordnance Storekeeper that the unit only possessed seventy-four barrels of serviceable powder, which would barely allow the one hundred forty-one cannons and twenty-eight mortars to fire seven rounds each. Pattison decided to dispatch an additional one hundred fifty barrels from the magazines in New York, but punctiliously reminded Captain Farrington that he should make all future requests to the Board of Ordnance.<sup>55</sup>

Pattison's deference to his military superiors and patrons clearly evinced his political acumen, but it did not inhibit his initiative to solve problems at the local level. When the Board of Ordnance failed to act on his frequent requests for artillery and gunpowder Pattison took matters into his own hands. When New York City's powder reserves dwindled to 958 barrels in August 1780, Pattison purchased an additional 500 barrels that had been captured by British privateers and brought into the city for sale. Around the same time, Pattison purchased thirty Swedish 12-pounder cannons for new defensive works that had been constructed on Long Island. In both instances Pattison provided himself with political cover by carefully noting Sir Henry Clinton's approval of his acquisitions to the Board of Ordnance. Thus the CINC legitimized Pattison's actions and prevented the Board of Ordnance from taking any retribution against him.<sup>56</sup>

Pattison demonstrated his adaptability in mitigating the dearth of crucial supplies within the North American theater, but the issue of personnel management proved a far greater test of his leadership and political deftness. He faced a myriad of challenges on

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<sup>55</sup> James Pattison, *Official Letters of Major General James Pattison, Commandant of Artillery*, Collections of the New-York Historical Society, vol. 8 (New York: The Society, 1876). *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 3-4 (hereafter cited as *Official Letters of James Pattison*).

<sup>56</sup> Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 195-196.

that front, ranging from discontented junior officers to perpetually understrength units, about which his options proved rather limited.

The Royal Artillery company commanders in North America were predominantly captains. Many of these young men chafed at the interminably lethargic rate of advancement for artillery officers during wartime when they saw the comparatively rapid advancement of infantry and cavalry officers. One cause of this malaise was the Royal Artillery's refusal to sell commissions; another was the relative safety of artillerists on the battlefield. Their low mortality rate in combat failed to create the numerous vacancies needed for quick upward mobility. By May 1779, artillery officers were forbidden from cross-commissioning into another branch to take advantage of their higher promotion opportunities.<sup>57</sup> Although most officers took these structural impediments to promotion in stride, some challenged Pattison's policies which they felt exacerbated the situation. The first policy dealt with how Pattison determined seniority for filling vacancies when they did occur. Instead of automatically selecting an officer from within a company to fill a vacant position, Pattison looked at the officers from all eight companies within the battalion, rank-ordered them in terms of seniority, and offered the position to the highest ranking potential replacement. This made promotion even more competitive since officers would have to compete against at least six or as many as fourteen of their peers depending on the position.<sup>58</sup> Pattison wrote to Captain George Rochfort, "As I make it a Rule for Promotions to go by Senior-ity in the Battalion, when accompanied with Merit, and not in the Company's (except when detached at a great

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<sup>57</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> The typical artillery company had 1 Captain, 1 Captain Lieutenant, 2 First Lieutenants, and 2 Second Lieutenants.

Distance) the Men you recommend cannot be advanced at present, there being [others with] much stronger Pretensions.”<sup>59</sup>

The second sensitive issue regarded how Pattison awarded leaves of absence for officers to return to England to strengthen their patronage networks. Captain William Johnstone, the Royal Artillery company commander in St. Augustine questioned the general on this point. Pattison responded, “As to the Idea...of Officers endeavoring to get off their Commands, no such Applications, have ever been made to me consequently I cannot have granted the improper Indulgencies you allude to.”<sup>60</sup> Pattison managed the requests of his subordinates who either pleaded illness or used their political connections to secure leave back in England as best he could because he was keenly aware of the negative impact that the numerous vacancies had upon his companies’ leadership. Nevertheless, in February 1779, at least four of Pattison’s other captains were simultaneously on convalescent leave in England.<sup>61</sup>

As depleted as were the officer ranks of the Royal Artillery in North America, they appeared the picture of health when compared with the enlisted force. The enlisted ranks were undermined by disease, desertion, corporal punishment, and combat. In February 1779 the Royal Artillery battalions in America were short 280 soldiers. Two months later that number jumped to 482.<sup>62</sup> These were not unique challenges for a military organization during the eighteenth century, but there were a number of circumstances that aggravated the situation. First, Pattison ignored customary procedure

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<sup>59</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 192.

<sup>60</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 46.

<sup>61</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 20.

<sup>62</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 20, 30.

when he brought the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Headquarters Staff to America. Battalions traditionally left their headquarters staff in England to facilitate recruiting and diligently to settle accounts so that the unit received its pay in a timely fashion. This mistake had significant ramifications for Pattison because it forced him to rely on Major General Samuel Cleaveland, Founder and Commandant of the Royal Military Repository, to oversee recruiting within the British Isles. The results were less than satisfactory. The foremost problem was the simple dearth of recruits who made it to America. In March 1779 Pattison thanked Cleaveland for his efforts, but pointed out that the arriving recruits only filled one-third of his vacancies. Although Pattison was initially pragmatic about accepting Irish troops, noting, “As to the Recruiting in Ireland, I can only say, Necessity has no Law – I most certainly shou’d give the Preference to raising our men in England or Scotland if possible, but if that is not the case we must do the best we can.” He soon changed his mind, however, referring to them as “Reptiles” prone to desert.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, and this was inextricably linked to the lack of an organic support staff at Woolwich, the quality of the recruits who arrived was poor. Ethnic biases aside, the men who arrived in America were not on the draft lists which led Pattison to conclude that the other battalions were siphoning off his best recruits and dumping their misfits on him.<sup>64</sup> Pattison sought to remedy these “*friendly Difficulties*” by sending Captain Congreve home convinced that “your Brother Officers, as well as myself will derive many

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<sup>63</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 27, 105.

<sup>64</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 105; Curtis, *Organization of the British Army*, 77-79. British units in North America replenished their strength by drafting, or transferring, troops from units in England. The unit receiving the drafted men paid the losing unit £5 per man on the draft list which served as an inventory. Most men resented being sent to another organization and sought ways to remain with their original unit. This prompted numerous schemes to find substitutes, and failing that, a refusal to send the full quota in many cases.

Advantages from having so *faithful a Steward* in England," but his presence made little difference.<sup>65</sup>

General Pattison's last major administrative duty as Commandant of the Royal Artillery in North America was to manage the organization's finances. In an era that considered graft an entitlement of office, Pattison's criterion of "consistent with the Good of the Service" to justify all expenses made him an example of financial probity.<sup>66</sup> He kept a close eye on all of the accounts and ensured that none of his officers received any pay they were not legitimately entitled to receive. This was especially true of baggage and forage pay, which were meant to offset costs of active campaigning in the field. Nevertheless, numerous subordinate officers applied for this special duty pay while in garrison. Pattison consistently turned them all down. Another common ploy for soldiers to squeeze a few more pence out of Parliament's purse strings was to hold multiple posts. While Pattison freely permitted his men to take on additional duties, he did not pay them for their actions without approval from the Board of Ordnance. He was also diligent about only paying for transport ships when their service was indispensable and rescinded contracts as soon as the need had passed.

Pattison's administrative responsibilities for supplies, unit troop strengths, and expenditures all had the same goal in mind: to maintain a combat-ready force that could take the field with the main army on campaign or support independent actions with detachments as required by the Commander-in-Chief for North America. Since 1776 Britain had implemented a twofold military strategy designed to crush the American Revolution: first, it opted to wage a war of posts, coupled with a naval blockade, to choke

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<sup>65</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 25.

<sup>66</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 141.

off vital war materiel needed by the Patriots; second, it sought to decisively defeat the Continental Army in a general action.

The war of posts was a conventional strategy of eighteenth-century linear warfare designed to seize the enemy's cities, supply magazines, and cut their lines of resupply and communication.<sup>67</sup> Maurice Comte de Saxe, Marshal-General of the Armies of France from 1747 to 1750, explained the strengths of a war of posts, or *guerre des postes*, as follows: "They [fortresses] serve to cover a country; they oblige an enemy to attack them, before they can penetrate further; they afford a safe retreat and cover to your own troops on all occasions; they contain magazines, and form a secure receptacle, in the winter-time, for artillery, ammunition, &c."<sup>68</sup> The British adopted this cautious strategy because their experiences in Boston taught them that attrition management would be the key to their victory. British Major General John Burgoyne astutely noted in the summer of 1775 that the American strategy should be to lose a battle every week to decimate the British Army, while Brigadier General Lord Hugh Percy wrote "our army is so small that we cannot even afford victory."<sup>69</sup> A war of posts would permit the British to methodically reclaim rebel territory while husbanding their resources in anticipation of an opportunity to strike a decisive blow.

The Continental Army also rapidly came to understand the virtues of this approach. Lieutenant General George Washington decided to adhere to this policy less than two weeks after his embarrassing defeat at the Battle of Long Island. On September

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<sup>67</sup> Ira D. Gruber, *British Strategy: The Theory and Practice of Eighteenth-Century Warfare*, ed. Don Higginbotham, *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*. Contributions in Military History, vol. 14 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), 14.

<sup>68</sup> Saxe, *Reveries, or, Memoirs Concerning the Art of War*, 133.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Mackesy, *War for America*, 85.



8, 1776 he wrote, “on our Side the War should be defensive. It has even been called a War of Posts. That we should on all occasions avoid a general Action, or put anything to the risque, unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn.”<sup>70</sup> Washington, however, adopted the strategy for significantly different reasons than the British. He sought to use fortifications to bolster the fighting morale and effectiveness of his predominantly raw recruits to nullify the advantages of the British Regulars in open terrain. Thus, although for different reasons and with different operational emphases, both sides remained dedicated to a war of posts for the vast majority of their conventional forces throughout the entire conflict.<sup>71</sup>

Britain’s second strategy was to decisively defeat the Continental Army in a general action to demonstrate the futility of continued resistance. Both of these strategies, the war of posts and a decisive general action, required the British to establish a formidable garrison in an American seaport: they chose New York City. Despite defeating the Continental Army at Long Island, White Plains, capturing Fort Washington, and driving the remnants of the American army across New Jersey into Pennsylvania, the British Army failed to put down the rebellion in 1776. Washington’s daring counterattacks on Trenton and Princeton at the close of 1776 and beginning of 1777 demonstrated the fundamental flaw in the war of posts strategy for the British in such an extensive country. The numerous garrisons required to secure New Jersey spread British

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<sup>70</sup> George Washington, *The Papers of George Washington. Revolutionary War Series*, ed. Philander D. Chase, Revolutionary War Series., vol. 6 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 249.

<sup>71</sup> The two notable exceptions to this trend were Sir William Howe’s attempt to destroy the Continental Army at the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777 by threatening Philadelphia and Nathanael Greene’s masterful southern campaign from 1780-1781 which was a combination of a war of maneuver and Fabian tactics that both physically exhausted and dwindled the British forces under Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis.

troops so thin that they could not resist a concentrated attack by the Americans. Furthermore, the British did not have enough soldiers to implement the strategy on colony-wide basis. Nevertheless, the British adhered to the same one-two punch strategy of defensive fortifications and climactic battles the following year with plans to capture Philadelphia, Fort Ticonderoga, and Albany. Lieutenant General Sir William Howe believed that threatening Philadelphia would force Washington to commit the Continental Army to the capital's defense, but that even if he refused battle, Britain's occupation of the city would tear the heart out of the rebellion and encourage Loyalists to rise up in support of Britain. Recently promoted Lieutenant General Burgoyne's mission was to cut rebellious New England off from the colonies to the south by seizing the key fortifications along the Hudson River. Although he conquered Fort Ticonderoga, his ultimate defeat and surrender at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777 led to a Franco-American alliance in February 1778 which confronted Britain with a global imperial contest.

The Franco-American alliance prompted the British to reallocate forces from America to defend more valuable colonies in the West Indies.<sup>72</sup> The British Ministry intended to compensate for the dearth of troops by implementing a pacification policy aimed at winning the "hearts and minds" of Loyalists in the southern colonies.<sup>73</sup> Despite its many initial successes, this shift in regional focus was not as profound as it initially appeared. Lieutenant General Clinton's capture of Charleston, South Carolina merely represented a continuation of the war of posts strategy. The British Army sought to clear

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<sup>72</sup> Mackesy, *War for America*, 180-189.

<sup>73</sup> John W. Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed : Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*, Rev. ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 193-212.

areas of the Continental Army and Patriot militia and then turn these pacified areas over to Loyalist militia units who would serve as the local garrisons to prevent any future incursions. This infusion of provincial troops would solve the undermanned garrison dilemma previously encountered in New Jersey and free up the regulars for continuous offensive action. As will be further shown, this was exactly what Pattison tried to do in New York following his appointment as commandant.

Clinton's 1779 campaign began with an amphibious raid by 2,000 troops against Virginia. Once those forces returned to New York they ascended the Hudson River for an attack against King's Ferry, which was anchored by Stony Point on the western shore and Verplanck's Point on the eastern bank. While most colonels did not personally lead their regiments, Pattison did. All eight companies in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion saw action in America during the War of Independence, and only one was absent from Pattison's victory at the capture of Stony and Verplanck's Points on June 1, 1779. Sir Henry Clinton's campaign plan for 1779 sought to compel Lieutenant General George Washington to participate in a decisive, conventional battle against the main British Army. Clinton wanted to lure Washington out of his cantonments in Morristown, New Jersey by destroying vital supplies and threatening the Continental Army's east-west line of communication closest to New York City.<sup>74</sup> The American garrison on Stony Point fled at the arrival of the British flotilla late in the afternoon on May 30, which permitted Pattison, whom Clinton had put in command of all forces on the western bank, to establish gun emplacements during the night. By five o'clock the next morning Pattison's battery on Stony Point began to bombard the rebel fortification, Fort Lafayette,

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<sup>74</sup>Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782, with an Appendix of Original Documents*, ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 121-125 (cited hereafter as *American Rebellion*).

across the river. The garrison of seventy-five men surrendered early that afternoon.

General Pattison remained at Stony Point for the next nine days overseeing the construction of fortifications and then returned to New York City.<sup>75</sup>

Pattison performed extremely well at Stony and Verplanck's Points, demonstrating both leadership by example and technical expertise, but he did so under conditions that favored the British in almost every regard. The British assault achieved complete surprise. When Pattison and the approximately 1,431 men of the 17<sup>th</sup>, 63<sup>rd</sup>, 64<sup>th</sup> Regiments of Foot accompanied by 120 Hessian *Jägers* landed on the western shore of Stony Point they were largely unopposed because the 350-man Continental garrison destroyed its own defenses and retreated without firing a shot. Pattison noted that, "A small Body of the Enemy made their appearance, but retired immediately on our landing- the Guns from the Opposite Fort [Lafayette] fir'd a great many Shot upon the Arm'd Galley's that were stationed to cover our landing, but without effect."<sup>76</sup> Unopposed from the front, and safe from Fort La Fayette's fire to the rear, the most difficult aspect of the operation was unloading the cannons and getting them up a 150-foot hill. Pattison wrote, "The landing Place for the Cannon was very inconvenient, being of deep Mud, and the Hill they were to be drawn up craggy, and of uncommon steep Ascent, 58 men in Harness, besides many more shoving at the wheels, were scarcely able to get up a heavy 12 P[ounde]r."<sup>77</sup> Within thirteen hours of landing Pattison's troops established an

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<sup>75</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 73-80.

<sup>76</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 75; Carson I. Ritchie, "A New York Diary of the Revolutionary War," *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (1966), 421. This diary was either written by Pattison himself or someone on his staff because the author clearly had access to Pattison's papers but refers to Pattison in the third person.

<sup>77</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 75.

artillery park on top of Stony Point consisting of a 10-inch mortar, an 8-inch howitzer, and two 12-pounder cannons. They discovered that the distance to Verplanck's Point was twice as far as they had been led to believe, 1,500 vice 800 yards, but demonstrated excellent marksmanship nevertheless. Hessian *Jäger* Captain Johann von Ewald watched the artillery barrage as he and his men laid siege to Fort Lafayette on the east side of the Hudson River. Ewald credited Pattison's precise bombardment for the rapid and casualty-free British victory over the Americans writing, "During the night General Pattison had erected a battery of two mortars and four heavy guns on Stony Point, from which side the fort was now cannonaded with very good effect. Toward midday the fort surrendered after a loss of thirty killed and as many badly wounded."<sup>78</sup> Ewald certainly exaggerated the casualties suffered by the Americans since the North Carolina unit defending the post totaled seventy-five men and officers of whom only four died, but he had a front row view to the demoralizing effects that obviated a *coup de main* against the position.

Back on the western side of the Hudson River Pattison diligently set his men to fortifying Stony Point. His defenses demonstrated that he was a conscientious, if conventional military thinker, who had tactical blind spots due to his branch. Pattison wrote to Lord Townshend,

There is no Ground that can be said to Command it, except one Hill which is at upwards of a Mile Distance, but the almost unsurmountable Difficulty's, which must attend bringing heavy Cannon over the Haverstraw Mountains makes any serious attack little to be expected, however I have Order'd all the Woods in our Front and on our right flank to be cut down, and Abbatis to be made in every Part of Practicable Approach.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Johann von Ewald, *Diary of the American War : A Hessian Journal*, trans., Joseph P. Tustin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 161-162.

<sup>79</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 77-78.

Whether Pattison was displaying his professional biases or simply playing to his audience by emphasizing the essential invulnerability of the position unless attacked by substantial artillery, other officers agreed with him. Captain John Peebles, a Scottish Grenadier in the 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of Foot, noted in his diary, “over at Stoney point, the Works there very near finish’d, a strong post – 12 [artillery] pieces – the lozenge work round the Blockhouse N. 2 finish’d, with a fleche towards the River and an abbatis round the whole”<sup>80</sup>

Pattison did more than just fortify Stony Point. When General Clinton and Major General Vaughan departed on June 3<sup>rd</sup> they left Pattison in command of all of the forces at both Stony and Verplanck’s Points. Left to his own initiative, Pattison took this opportunity to seek out supplies for his men and information about the rebels. Informed by refugees that there were 500 cattle within six miles of his lines Pattison sent out a detachment of 500 men under Lieutenant Colonel Johnson on a night raid. The action only netted forty to fifty cattle, but clearly demonstrated Pattison’s inclination to be proactive.<sup>81</sup> Pattison demonstrated both his offensive spirit and his physical courage when he personally led a scouting party of fifty *Jägers* in search of 150 militiamen reported to be within two-and-a-half miles from the British posts. This expedition did not encounter the Americans, but Pattison did gather some vital intelligence for his Commander-in-Chief. During the Battle of Bennington on August 16, 1777, the Americans captured a Brunswicker by the name of Charles Tornier. He joined the rebels

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<sup>80</sup>John Peebles, *John Peebles' American War : The Diary of a Scottish Grenadier, 1776-1782*, ed. Society Army Records and Ira D. Gruber, Publications of the Army Records Society ; Vol. 13 (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998), 270.

<sup>81</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 78.

to end his internment as a prisoner of war (POW), and deserted from his duty station at West Point when he learned that the British Army was thirteen miles away. Tornier provided Pattison with enough information to make a comprehensive sketch of West Point's defenses and forwarded it to Clinton.<sup>82</sup> On Saturday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, with the fortifications at Stony Point essentially complete, Pattison returned to New York City.

## **Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York**

Although the battle of Stony and Verplanck's Points was a lopsided affair that never seriously challenged the nearly 8,000 British soldiers engaged, Pattison demonstrated a number of admirable qualities that Sir Henry Clinton noticed. Pattison's "judicious exertions" during this opening phase of Clinton's 1779 campaign thoroughly impressed the Commander-in-Chief and prompted him to appoint Pattison as Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York on July 5, 1779.<sup>83</sup> This new administrative responsibility was in addition to his duties as the Commandant for the Royal Artillery in North America. Pattison tried to relieve himself of those burdens by offering his resignation to the Board of Ordnance on May 2, 1779. He told the Board, "The extensive & complicated Command I have is sufficiently onerous of itself- but under the present circumstances, the Weight becomes less supportable, I shou'd therefore be exceedingly glad if I might be permitted to transfer it to abler hands." Pattison confided his frustration to a friend two days later admitting that he was "quite jaded," but

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<sup>82</sup>Ritchie, "A New York Diary of the Revolutionary War," 424.

<sup>83</sup>Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 125.

the Board did not accept his resignation and he remained in charge of the Royal Artillery for the duration of his stay in America.<sup>84</sup>

Despite Pattison's inability to resign from his warfighting duties associated with the Royal Artillery, his appointment as commandant of New York City nevertheless represented a strategic shift in his career. His primary focus became the administration of the city and it consumed his waking hours. As he wrote to Tryon, "The very desirable & pleasant Command, I am at present possess'd of, namely the Garrison & City of New York, so completely engages my mornings, that I have just now only Time to offer you my Warmest wishes." He likewise informed Captain Chapman, "my present Situation as Commandant of this Garrison and City so fully occupies my time, that I can hardly find Leisure to write a Line."<sup>85</sup> Pattison's new role as Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York made him responsible for "His Majesty's Forces on the Island of New York, Long Island, Staten Island and the Posts depending," most notably Paulus Hook in modern-day Jersey city.<sup>86</sup> His military duties emphasized the security of the posts as well as the discipline and welfare of the troops within them. However, he also acquired unavoidable civil duties given the 25,000 civilians living in and around New York City.<sup>87</sup>

The inherently hybrid civil-military nature of the commandant's position demanded different approaches to the problems of rebellion and governance within the British lines. With the exception of the Commander-in-Chief, no other British military

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<sup>84</sup> Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 56-59.

<sup>85</sup> Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 92, 125.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel Jones to Andrew Elliot, May 4, 1778. James Pattison Papers. microfilm.

<sup>87</sup> Oscar Theodore Barck Jr., *New York City During the War for Independence: With Special Reference to the Period of British Occupation*, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law ; No. 357 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 75.



officer had such wide ranging and varied responsibilities which touched upon the core causes of the rebellion. Pattison's tenure as commandant provided him with the necessary insights to mobilize the military potential of the city's inhabitants. While battlefield victories would encourage Loyalism, they needed to be supplemented by effective governance, and a demonstration of the benefits of British rule.

One of the most delicate aspects of this new situation was its implications for Pattison's chain-of-command. The Board of Ordnance remained one chain to which Pattison had to report. He also had to serve Clinton in three separate capacities; first, by supporting the CINC's campaign plans with the requisite artillery; second, by securing New York as a base of operations from which to launch those campaigns; and third, maintaining law and order within the city that housed Clinton's headquarters. There were numerous times when these goals conflicted, forcing Pattison to prioritize and alter policy accordingly.

The 1779 campaign, which had such auspicious beginnings for both Clinton and Pattison at Stony and Verplanck's Points, rapidly degenerated into a series of embarrassing and costly setbacks that put the British on the defensive. On the night of July 15-16 Major General Anthony Wayne of Pennsylvania led 1,200 men of the Continental Corps of Light Infantry against the 624-man British garrison at Stony Point. Achieving complete surprise, Wayne captured the position within a mere twenty-five minutes. The Americans lost fifteen killed and had another eighty-four men wounded, but captured 546 British troops while killing or dispersing another eighty.<sup>88</sup> Clinton

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<sup>88</sup>*Encyclopedia of the American Revolution : Library of Military History*, ed. Mark Mayo Boatner and Harold E. Selesky, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution. (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2006), 1119; Armstrong Starkey, "Paoli to Stony Point: Military Ethics and Weaponry During the American Revolution," *The Journal of Military History* 58, no. 1 (1994): 7-27.

responded with uncharacteristic celerity mounting a second expedition to recapture the positions. Washington's decision to evacuate the posts on July 18th, however, ensured another rapid yet largely meaningless victory for the British when they reoccupied the positions on the 20<sup>th</sup>. British frustration regarding Stony Point culminated when Clinton withdrew the British garrisons into New York City in October fearing the arrival of a French fleet under the command of the Comte d'Estaing.

The Americans' unsuspected success, and the subsequent abandonment of the Stony and Verplanck's Points, proved to be quite dispiriting to the British. Upon hearing of Anthony Wayne's capture Captain Peebles wrote, "The affair at Stony Point not so mortal as we hear'd at first [rumors of a massacre], but by all accounts they have been surprized, & the Rebels have gained a point, & perform'd an action, by which we have lost, & they have gain'd, much credit."<sup>89</sup> The shock permeated public opinion back in New York City as well. Following Clinton's recapture of the posts the Moravian minister Ewald Gustav Schaukirk commented, "it has been a bad stroke, a loss of several hundred men to our army."<sup>90</sup> Captain Ewald lamented, "Perhaps we shall not take these important posts from Washington again so cheaply. Once more, we are now no further than we were at the beginning of the campaign.-How easily can the plan of an entire campaign be upset by the negligence of an officer to whom a post is entrusted!"<sup>91</sup> Peebles echoed Ewald's sentiments wryly observing that "the taking & making of [that

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<sup>89</sup>Peebles, *John Peebles' American War*, 278.

<sup>90</sup>Schaukirk, "Occupation of New York City by the British," 9.

<sup>91</sup>Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 179.

post], & the losing & taking & making again, has cost us 7 or 800 men & seems to have been the whole business or object of the Campaign.”<sup>92</sup>

This criticism of Clinton’s campaign plan was ill-informed, since Clinton’s grandiose goal for the campaign of 1779 had been nothing less than the destruction of the Continental Army. Unfortunately for Clinton, Rear Admiral Marriot Arbuthnot arrived four months late and brought 3,500 sickly reinforcements incapable of campaigning. The arrival of D’Estaing’s fleet in American waters exacerbated Clinton’s perception of weakness which prompted him to hunker down in a defensive posture around New York City evacuating both Stony Point and Rhode Island. Major General William Tryon led the only other offensive British actions that year consisting of amphibious raids against Connecticut.<sup>93</sup>

Pattison dutifully supported Clinton’s troop realignments and defended his commander-in-chief’s strategy. Clinton ordered the evacuation of Newport, Rhode Island on October 4, 1779, and the redeployment to New York only took two weeks from October 11-25, 1779. One of the reasons that the troop movement went as smoothly as it did was the result of Pattison’s prior planning. Long before any British officials contemplated evacuating Rhode Island, Pattison took the opportunity to visit the Royal Artillery company stationed there for fifteen days in March 1779. During that trip he inspected the discipline and readiness of the artillerists and considered them to be “in the State and Condition, which I had Reason to expect under the Orders of so Good an

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<sup>92</sup>Peebles, *John Peebles' American War*, 301.

<sup>93</sup>William Bradford Willcox, *Portrait of a General: Sir Henry Clinton in the War of Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1964), 273-293.

Officer” as their commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Innes, Sr.<sup>94</sup> As soon as Clinton informed Pattison of his intent to evacuate Rhode Island, Pattison sent secret orders to Innes on September 26<sup>th</sup> to begin embarking “the Heavy Cannon and the most Cumbersome stores, now on Shore” without compromising the security of the post. He also stressed the need for operational security writing, “I am persuaded you will transact this *preparatory* Business in such a Manner as shall mask the *real* Design as much as possible.” Pattison, ever fiscally-minded, further advised Innes to secure additional transport vessels to prevent the significant losses that would result from having to destroy any artillery horses or forage left behind.<sup>95</sup> Innes put the extra fifteen days to good use. He successfully embarked twenty field pieces, nine howitzers, seventeen mortars, and seventy-two iron guns of various sizes, in addition to all of their ammunition and gunpowder. Innes further managed to find space aboard the transports for fifty-two of his seventy-two artillery horses. Unfortunately, the Royal Artillery left behind one hundred forty-three tons of hay and oats, while the entire garrison left behind over 1200 tons for want of shipping.<sup>96</sup> Even Thomas Jones, the Justice of the Supreme Court of the Province of New York and an implacable critic of Clinton, begrudgingly admitted the generally successful nature of the evacuation: “It is true the troops all came away, so did the Loyalists, the refugees, and every person obnoxious to rebellion. The stores, provisions, and artillery were brought away, but all the wood and forage laid in for 6,000

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<sup>94</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 30. Innes’s son, John, was a Lieutenant in the same company.

<sup>95</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 116-117.

<sup>96</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 133. These were long tons or British Imperial tons of 2240 lbs. or 20 long hundredweight (cwt). The United States uses the short ton which is 2000 lbs. or 20 short hundredweight.

men during the winter, were left behind.<sup>97</sup> Pattison's proactive leadership enabled his subordinates to accomplish this relocation in an exemplary fashion despite the shipping constraints.

Pattison also defended Clinton's defensive strategy for both philosophical and personal reasons against Major General William Tryon's calls for more aggressive action. Like Clinton, Pattison firmly fell into what historian Stephen Conway has referred to as the "conciliatory" camp; those British officers who either for moral reasons, enlightened notions of civility, or practical political considerations exercised restraint against rebels and the civilian population. Tryon and other advocates of the fire and sword approach to subduing the rebellion, however, became the "hard-line."<sup>98</sup> Tryon averred, "The usurpers have professedly placed their hopes of severing the empire in avoiding decisive actions [and] upon the waste of the British treasures and the escape of their own property during the protraction of the war." Tryon sought to end the rebellion by turning the tables on the rebels with a scorched-earth policy designed to exhaust their bases of support. Tryon further asserted that he would counter rebel "tyranny" with "general terror and despondency" which would not result in a political backlash along the Connecticut coast because the colonists there were "a people already divided, and settled on a coast everywhere thinly inhabited and easily impressible."<sup>99</sup> Tryon clearly saw time as being

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<sup>97</sup>Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, 1:316.

<sup>98</sup>Stephen Conway, "To Subdue America: British Army Officers and the Conduct of the Revolutionary War," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (1986), 382; Armstrong Starkey, "War and Culture, a Case Study: The Enlightenment and the Conduct of the British Army in America, 1755-1781," *War & Society* 8, no. 1 (1990). Starkey contends that the only demonstrable influence of the Enlightenment upon the officer corps' culture was towards the recognition of the humanity of the rank and file soldiers despite the restraints imposed by the government's policy of conciliation.

<sup>99</sup>Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 414.

on the side of the rebels and argued that Clinton's defensive strategy played into their hands by exhausting Britain while not making any progress.

Tryon's destructive amphibious raids against Connecticut in July 1779 provoked bitter recriminations against him throughout British Army Headquarters. Commodore Sir George Collier, Commander-in-Chief of his Majesty's Ships and Vessels in North America, and Tryon issued a joint warning on July 4<sup>th</sup> to the inhabitants of Connecticut that the British "forbearance you have ungenerously construed into fear; but whose lenity has persisted in its mild and noble efforts, even though branded with the most unworthy imputation" would soon come to an end.<sup>100</sup> With the population thus duly warned, the two men led 2,600 soldiers to New Haven, East Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk. British forces plundered the first two towns and burned the latter two supposedly because snipers fired at the British soldiers from concealed positions within the houses. Tryon's admission that two churches had been destroyed in the conflagration convinced Clinton to put a halt to any further raids.<sup>101</sup> According to Loyalist William Smith, Chief Justice of New York from 1763 to 1782, when Tryon returned he and Pattison had a heated exchange about the political consequences of his actions. Pattison demanded, "What Commander-in-Chief will dare to burn and bring on himself the censures of the opposition?" Tryon exploded, "You'll do nothing then till you find a general regardless of all factions and attached to his King and country!"<sup>102</sup> Tryon was convinced that

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<sup>100</sup>"By Commodore Sir George Collier, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Ships and Vessels in North America; and Major-General William Tryon, Commanding His Majesty's Land Forces on a Separate Expedition. Address to the Inhabitants of Connecticut.," *The New-York Gazette, and Weekly Mercury*, July 12, 1779 (cited hereafter as *New-York Gazette*).

<sup>101</sup>Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 130-131.

<sup>102</sup>Willcox, *Portrait of a General*, 278.

Clinton and his supporters would use any excuse, including criticism from members of Parliament who opposed the war, to justify Clinton's overly-cautious inactivity. Tryon, meanwhile, insisted that much more could be done with the forces on hand, and that duty to the King and country demanded greater exertions in subduing the rebellion.

Although this confrontation was largely the result of ideological differences, its intensity came from Tryon's multiple affronts towards Pattison at the beginning of the campaign. Without consulting Pattison, Tryon made his own determination regarding how much artillery the raids would require and managed to have Clinton issue the orders. Tryon's maneuver to go around Pattison not only insulted his technical expertise, but demonstrated Tryon's arrogance by asserting his recently-granted seniority over him. Tryon's contempt for Clinton was also well-known, so the willingness of Pattison's patron to grant favors to one of his critics over his client added insult to injury.<sup>103</sup> Despite these hard feelings, Pattison maintained his professionalism, and dutifully provided Tryon's expedition with Captain Traill's artillery company equipped with four three-pounders and one howitzer as requested.<sup>104</sup>

The next major expedition Pattison supported as Commandant of the Royal Artillery in North America was Clinton's siege of Charleston, South Carolina. In 1779 Secretary of State for the American Department Lord George Germain suggested that Henry Clinton should implement the Southern strategy, but left the final discretion up to

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<sup>103</sup>Carl Leopold Baurmeister, *Revolution in America: Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces*, trans., Bernhard A. Uhlendorf (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 136 n76. Tryon's initial military commission as a major general in 1777 was in the provincials rather than the British Army so Pattison as a brigadier general, even though it was only a local rank, outranked Tryon upon his arrival in America that year. Tryon did not receive a regular commission as a major general until May 1778. Nevertheless, this gave him nine months of seniority over Pattison whose promotion to major general was not effective until February 2, 1779.

<sup>104</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 85-86.

the general. Clinton acceded to Germain's wishes for a Southern offensive, but left a sizeable garrison to defend New York City. On December 26th, Clinton departed for Charleston with 8,500 soldiers and received substantial reinforcements during the siege that brought his total strength up to 14,000.<sup>105</sup> During this time Clinton left 10,000 troops in New York under the command of Lieutenant General Baron Wilhelm von Knyphausen, Commander-in-Chief of the Hessian forces. Pattison supported the Charleston expedition by sending Captain George Rochfort's entire company to join Captain William Johnstone's company and another detachment of thirty-men already assigned to Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis for a total of one hundred and sixty men. Pattison needed to hire another transport ship, *Rosamond*, to carry the cannons which consisted of at least sixty 24 pounders, eight 30 pounders, four 6 pounders, two 3 pounders, and a number of howitzers.<sup>106</sup> Clinton's six-week-long siege of Charleston, from March 29 – May 12, 1780, culminated in the capture of 5,000 Continental soldiers under the command of Major General Benjamin Lincoln.

While Pattison's military duties for the Royal Artillery were demanding, his responsibilities for defending New York City and the "posts depending" – including Long Island, Staten Island, and Paulus Hook - presented an even greater challenge. These locations encompassed an area of 1,671 square miles, some 400 square miles larger than the entire colony of Rhode Island. Even more daunting, commandants only had a minuscule portion of the army detailed to them for garrison duty, leaving the rest in

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<sup>105</sup>Clinton, *American Rebellion*, xxxiv; Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence : Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 356.

<sup>106</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 118-120; Franklin Benjamin Hough, *The Siege of Charleston, by the British Fleet and Army under the Command of Admiral Arbuthnot and Sir Henry Clinton, Which Terminated with the Surrender of That Place on the 12th of May, 1780* [Electronic Resource] (Albany: J. Munsell, 1867), 162.



theory available for operations outside the city. For example, in November 1779 Pattison only had direct command over four Hessian grenadier battalions, the 42<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Regiment, the 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Skinner's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, and the heavy artillery. This amounted to approximately 4,000 of the 18,500 British and Hessian troops in and around New York City.<sup>107</sup> Considering their extensive geographical responsibilities and paltry assigned forces, commandants needed to carefully coordinate the efforts amongst the British forces to secure New York City.

As the garrison commander Pattison maintained the city's defenses by strictly observing the chain of command and establishing a good rapport with as many of the other military commanders in the region as possible because he was junior to many of them. Pattison's nominal subordinates for the purpose of defending the city, prior to the departure of the Charleston expedition, included Major General Edward Matthew on Manhattan, Lieutenant General Lord Charles Cornwallis on Long Island, and Loyalist Brigadier General Cortlandt Skinner on Staten Island.<sup>108</sup> The presence of the Commander-in-Chief and his headquarters staff within the city complicated the chain of command. In most other occupied cities, the commandant was the senior ranking officer with all military forces assigned underneath him. When the commandant in New York wanted to use forces other than those assigned to him, he had to request them from the Commander-in-Chief.<sup>109</sup> This was true even when the commandant outranked the unit's commander. The commandants could, however, rely on personal relationships to get the support that

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<sup>107</sup>Baurmeister, *Revolution in America*, 318-320; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 182-183.

<sup>108</sup>Ritchie, "A New York Diary of the Revolutionary War," 446; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 182-183.

<sup>109</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 272, 353.

they needed. In an impressive display of Army-Navy cooperation, in the winter of 1780 Pattison persuaded Royal Navy Captain Tryingham Howe to detach 330 seamen from the fleet in New York harbor to serve in Manhattan's redoubts.<sup>110</sup>

The "Posts depending" that the commandants were responsible for defending posed more practical challenges of command and control because of the difficulty of communicating with them. The Patriots' raid on Paulus Hook on August 19, 1779 was an excellent example. This post, located on the west bank of the Hudson River, was vital to protecting the harbor. Lieutenant Mackenzie explained, "The possession of this post [Paulus Hook] secures the principal anchorage in the North [Hudson] River, and renders the communication with the North part of the town, by water, safe."<sup>111</sup> American Lieutenant Colonel "Light Horse" Henry Lee led a daring early morning assault on the position, and although he failed to destroy it, he eliminated the garrison by capturing 150 prisoners.<sup>112</sup> The surprise action caught the rest of the city's defenders off-guard which prevented them from sending any timely assistance. In the wake of this debacle, Commandant Pattison established early warning signals for all of the city's outlying posts which consisted of anywhere from one to six cannon shots for the posts in northern Manhattan, and three vertical lights for Paulus Hook.<sup>113</sup> Although the rebels raided New York innumerable times after their victory at Paulus Hook, they were unable to equal its success.

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<sup>110</sup> Pattison, *Official Letters of Major General James Pattison, Commandant of Artillery*, 262.

<sup>111</sup> Frederick Mackenzie, *Diary of Frederick Mackenzie, Giving a Daily Narrative of His Military Service as an Officer of the Regiment of Royal Welch Fusiliers During the Years 1775-1781 in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York.*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 62.

<sup>112</sup> Ritchie, "A New York Diary of the Revolutionary War," 433.

<sup>113</sup> Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 230, 346-349.

Just as Pattison rectified his difficulties with coordination between the forces needed for defense through local-level initiatives, the office of commandant also provided the authority to implement policies to alleviate his manpower shortfalls. Pattison did this by raising militia units from the city's inhabitants. New York's Royal Governor William Tryon set the precedent when he raised the first Loyalist volunteer company in October 1776, and by November 22, 1777 twenty such units existed.<sup>114</sup> During the winter of 1780 when the rivers surrounding New York City froze, eliminating its natural moat, Pattison mobilized the militia with both the carrot and the stick. He decided to test the inhabitants' proclamation from the previous November that stated, "we freely offer ourselves to be formed in such military array as shall be thought proper" by asking for volunteers while simultaneously conscripting all men between the ages of seventeen and sixty.<sup>115</sup> The only exemptions that he granted were to men already in the Provincial militias, 260 firefighters, and 140 Quakers because of their pacifist religious convictions.<sup>116</sup> This raised 2,662 militiamen which augmented the 3,135 men in the volunteer companies and seamen for a grand total of 5,797.<sup>117</sup> The commandant paid special attention to the rules and regulations he developed for the militias to maximize participation and combat effectiveness. He empowered the militia captains to judge excuses of members who failed to report for duty. Those suspected of shirking their duty

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<sup>114</sup>Barck Jr., *New York City During the War for Independence*, 196. Manhattan was divided into twenty wards, and each ward was required to establish a militia company. These militia units were only for city defense and should not be confused with the Loyalist Provincial militias or Associated Loyalists who conducted many independent offensive actions and also served alongside the British Army in the field as auxiliaries.

<sup>115</sup> *New-York Gazette*, November 22, 1779, 3.

<sup>116</sup>Robertson, *Twilight of British Rule*, 151.

<sup>117</sup>Robertson, *Twilight of British Rule*, 106.

during an alarm were jailed in the “Main Guard” which was the prison on the lower floor of City Hall. Delinquents who failed to attend the minimum biweekly practice drills were fined, first for two dollars, and then two additional dollars for each repeat offense. The fines went into the city funds and were used to pay for weapons for indigent militiamen and other services for the poor.<sup>118</sup>

Pattison’s singular success in raising and calling out the militia stemmed from his perceived military competence and hands-on leadership style. Pattison impressed both subordinates and superiors with the military results he achieved. On April 28, 1778 Grenadier Peebles commented, “The Royl. Artillery had a Review today in the Common, they went thro’ the old fashion’d things in Battalion with 26 pors. [pounders] On each flank; they look very well & are much improved since [James] Pattison came.”<sup>119</sup> Clinton summed up Pattison’s exploits at Stony Point thusly: “His exertions and good arrangements, seconded by the cheerful labour of the troops, gave me the satisfaction of seeing a battery of cannon and mortars opened at the next morning on the summit of this difficult rock. Their effect was soon perceived.”<sup>120</sup> Men cheerfully submitting to his will and following him into battle, his ability to rapidly accomplish arduous tasks, and the initial success of the Stony Point operation all gave Pattison a patina of military glory that was enthusiastically reported by the local press for public consumption.

Contrary to Clinton’s claims that the militia only mobilized in the winter of 1779/1780 because of the imminent threat of invasion, the militia continued to grow in size and skill throughout Pattison’s tenure. One month prior to Pattison’s departure in

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<sup>118</sup> Robertson, *Twilight of British Rule*, 150-151.

<sup>119</sup> Peebles, *John Peebles’ American War*, 177.

<sup>120</sup> *New-York Gazette*, September 27, 1779, 2.

September of 1780, and long after winter ice had made Manhattan temporarily vulnerable to a land assault, Hessian Lieutenant John Charles Philip von Krafft commented, “The militia of the city was daily increased and well divided into several regiments and equipments.”<sup>121</sup> Major Baurmeister was equally impressed with Pattison’s martial abilities observing, “We were not only in the best defensive position but benefited from the fact that the inhabitants of this city are faithful royalists. Within a week’s time, as the enclosed list [missing] will show, they armed and uniformed over five thousand men.”<sup>122</sup> Clinton may have been correct that the threat of invasion was the proximate cause that created the militia, but continued expansion of the system in the absence of immediate danger is indicative of Pattison’s leadership.

Pattison’s effect upon discipline and readiness emanated from his personal attention to all matters, great and small. On June 29, 1779, a little more than two weeks after he departed Stony Point, he grilled Captain Traille about the progress of the defenses and why his earlier orders about establishing a powder magazine had not yet been executed.<sup>123</sup> Pattison freely delegated, but he did not hesitate to step in when he felt that subordinates overlooked their duties. He ordered new gun carriages and paint jobs for thirty-six cannons on Manhattan and Governor’s Island. He likewise ordered four 6-pounders, two 3-pounders, and one 4.4 inch howitzer be placed on snow sleighs so that they could be rapidly repositioned during the winter of 1780. He also ordered Joshua Loring, British Commissary of Prisoners, to fix the fence around the North Church Prison

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<sup>121</sup> Johann Carl Philipp von Krafft, *Journal of Lt. John Charles Philip Von Krafft, 1776-1784*, ed. Thomas H. Edsall and William Freeman Goldbeck, New-York Historical Society. Collections. The John Watts De Peyster Publications Fund Series ; V. 15 (New York: The Society, 1883), 118.

<sup>122</sup> Baurmeister, *Revolution in America*, 339.

<sup>123</sup> Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 82-84.

to ensure that no prisoners escaped His omnipresence at review parades, inspecting the city's defenses, and public functions gave him an aura of omniscience.<sup>124</sup>

The final characteristic that served Pattison well as a leader of men was his genuine gratitude. He put his observant nature to good use by going out of his way to thank and the praise the troops whenever he could. This inspired a degree of loyalty that few other senior British leaders possessed. When the citizens of New York first offered to form a militia Pattison responded that their gesture "will ever redound to your credit, as it must evince to the world the sincerity of your loyal professions."<sup>125</sup> Later Pattison congratulated the citizens because, "So very numerous and respectable a body of Militia being enrolled and assembled under arms, in the short space of seven days after issuing the Proclamation, must reflect a lasting credit upon them, and deserves the highest commendation." He went on to recognize the "very military dress and appearance of the Independent and Volunteer City Companies" and credited them with "first setting this laudable example" of enlistment throughout the city which had been long overdue.<sup>126</sup> When members of the militia and the associated refugees built a new redoubt along the East River Pattison extolled the "lasting credit to themselves" for the fortification's

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<sup>124</sup> *New-York Gazette*, October 25, 1779, 3. Pattison thanks the citizens for building the defenses on Governor's Island and releases the militia from further duty; *New-York Gazette*, December 6, 1779, 3. Clinton and Pattison review a parade by the Highland Volunteer Militia in honor of St. Andrew's Day; *New-York Gazette*, January 24, 1780, 2-3. Governor Tryon gave a dinner to all of the ranking generals in NY, including Pattison, in honor of the Queen's birthday on January 18<sup>th</sup>. Pattison and the Baroness von Riedesel opened the ball celebrating "her Majesty's birthday" later that evening; *New-York Gazette*, January 31, 1780, 3. Pattison and Tryon review the militia; *New-York Gazette*, February 7, 1780, 3. Knyphausen, Tryon, and Pattison review 2,000 militia; *New-York Gazette*, May 22, 1780, 3. Pattison reviewed a parade by the Royal Artillery.

<sup>125</sup> *New-York Gazette*, November 22, 1779, 2.

<sup>126</sup> *New-York Gazette*, February 14, 1780, 2.

“very satisfactory Manner” and thanked them for “this fresh Instance” of their “readiness and good Will.”<sup>127</sup>

An additional responsibility for defense that fell under Pattison’s purview, and one that caused significant hardships, was fortification of the city and its surroundings. New York’s prewar Justice of the Supreme Court Thomas Jones wrote, “The office of the Commandant of the City, with a number of other useless, lucrative employments, contrived to rob the nation, and fill the pockets of favourites.”<sup>128</sup> Although Jones had many grievances against British officials, he felt that they unnecessarily spent £300,000 rebuilding rebel fortifications on Staten Island and placing new defenses around Manhattan and Long Island.<sup>129</sup> While his fellow Loyalists might not have concluded that speculation was responsible for the new defensive works, they certainly shared his disdain of having the militias perform their duty by working on the fortifications without any compensation other than the meager rations that their regular counterparts received.<sup>130</sup> Although these hardships understandably caused complaints amongst the population, they appear to have been prudent given the military threat the French fleet posed to New York following France’s entry into the war. French Admiral Count d’Estaing blockaded New York in July 1778 before proceeding to Newport, Rhode Island. The French planned a coordinated amphibious assault with Washington against New York in July 1780, but the British launched a preventative strike and blockaded the French fleet in Newport.

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<sup>127</sup> *New-York Gazette*, June 5, 1780, 3.

<sup>128</sup> Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, 2: 23.

<sup>129</sup> Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, 1:347-349.

<sup>130</sup> Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, 1:348; Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 392-393.

Another military responsibility of the city commandant that rankled the civilian population was administering the city's quartering policy for troops. Although the Barrack Master General's Department oversaw day-to-day operations, it reported to the commandant. Cognizant of American sensitivities to boarding soldiers, but forced to make use of all available space within the city to accommodate the forces, Pattison tried to prevent the worst abuses and did everything he could to assuage hostilities caused by poor conduct. The case of Mr. Joshua Pell in February 1780 was commonplace during the time. Pell provided housing for twenty-seven cavalymen in the Queen's Rangers under Lieutenant Allan McNabb who wore out their welcome by behaving "...in a very unruly manner by breaking open an apartment and taking away his Poultry, making use of his Hay and burning his Firewood in a very lavish manner, as also being very Noisy & troublesome to himself and Family."<sup>131</sup> Commandant Pattison ordered an immediate investigation into the complaint and demanded swift punishment for any guilty parties. If boarding in private homes was offensive, commandeering places of worship was anathema. Although the British Army spared the Episcopal churches, St. Paul's and St. George's, they used the French Church, North Dutch Church, Baptist Church, and Quaker Meeting House as barracks and hospitals.<sup>132</sup> Pattison, ever eager to assuage resentments, apologized to the minister of the North Dutch Church for imposing wounded soldiers upon him, thanked him on their behalf, and vacated the premises as the earliest possible time.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 365.

<sup>132</sup>Barck Jr., *New York City During the War for Independence*, 161.

<sup>133</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 373.



Last, but certainly not least, among the commandants' security charges was to protect the city against spies. Throughout the war British and Hessian forces complained about the disparity between the Patriots' intelligence gathering capabilities and that of the British Army. On March 17, 1777 General William Howe's Hessian aide de camp, Captain Friederich von Muenchhausen, wrote "We never know these two things [enemy's location and strength] because of our lack of good spies. The farmers are generally in favor of the rebels and are careful not to give us any information, especially since the English do not know how to pay spies."<sup>134</sup> Although the British improved their spy networks over the years, so too did the rebels, and, as a result, the New York City garrison remained highly susceptible to penetration. Pattison worked to counter this threat by limiting access within the city's defensive perimeter. One of the tricks of war, or *ruse de guerre*, that the Patriots' employed was using female spies who entered the city under the pretext of selling their provisions at market.<sup>135</sup> Another favorite ploy was to send spies under a flag of truce to conduct reconnaissance of the city's fortifications. Commandant Pattison put an end to these practices by keeping all messengers with flags of truce outside of the city's most advanced pickets, and establishing a weekly exchange of flags by a single British vessel.<sup>136</sup> Eager to impede the spy networks that operated from Elizabeth Town, through Staten Island, and into New York he also required passes for all boat traffic.

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<sup>134</sup>Friedrich Ernst von Muenchhausen, *At General Howe's Side, 1776-1778 : The Diary of General William Howe's Aide De Camp, Captain Friedrich Von Muenchhausen.*, trans., Ernst Kipping. Annotated by Samuel Stelle Smith., Philip Freneau Press Bicentennial Series on the American Revolution (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1974), 10.

<sup>135</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 367.

<sup>136</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 228, 255, 276.

In order to be a successful commandant Pattison had to negotiate the competing interests of the military and civilian populations in New York City. In many respects his position resembled that of the Commander-in-Chief on a smaller scale because he had to implement downward-directed military and political policies while trying to fight the war on his superiors' terms. Starting in 1776 with Major General James Robertson the commandants pursued a pacification policy designed to improve the quality of life in the city to the point where it coaxed the fence-sitters in the surrounding areas to return to their "proper" allegiance. Commandant Robertson maintained, "I always considered the great object of the war to be the regaining of the people, and to do this by letting them see we were their friends."<sup>137</sup> Pattison focused his efforts on law and order, regulating markets and commerce, and providing relief to displaced refugees and other indigents to show his good intentions towards the inhabitants of New York.

Restoring law and order to New York City in the wake of its occupation proved much more difficult than expected. The occupying force immediately established martial law, but the stresses placed on the city's occupants by wartime conditions of overcrowding and scarcity made maintaining order challenging. Pattison and his predecessors attacked the disorder with a two-pronged strategy that relied on military justice and a new hybrid organization known as a Court of Police.

Unit commanders were responsible for enforcing military discipline upon their subordinates. When they failed to do so, resulting in harm to the civilian population, Pattison stepped in to reprimand the commanding officers and seek punishment for the guilty parties. The two endemic offenses perpetrated by British soldiers were plundering

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<sup>137</sup>Milton M. Klein, "An Experiment That Failed: General James Robertson and Civil Government in British New York, 1779-1783," *New York History* 61:3 (1980): 242.

and destroying private property for firewood.<sup>138</sup> Commandant Pattison attempted to curtail these nefarious nighttime activities with enhanced patrols. He employed three Hessian regiments and had them randomly vary the times and directions of their march.<sup>139</sup> These conventional approaches curbed the worst abuses, but could not stamp out the pillaging.

The Court of Police, on the other hand, was an innovation designed to provide justice for a population deprived of civilian courts. This, of course, begs two questions: first, why were the courts closed; and second, what prevented the British Army from reopening them once they occupied the city? The surprising answer to the first question is that the courts remained open during the American occupation, but once the British Army “liberated” the city they closed them. William Howe did so because he, like many other British officials, believed that the Prohibitory Act of 1775 abolished civil government in the colonies. Even those who disagreed, and argued that the Prohibitory Act only applied to trade, acquiesced after the Declaration of Independence.<sup>140</sup> The military kept the civilian courts closed because they feared that if they reopened them they would be buried in an avalanche of litigation concerning their foraging and quartering practices. Military leaders developed the Court of Police as a balance between military necessity and civil justice. On May 1, 1777 William Howe established the first Court of Police in Manhattan. It consisted of a three-member panel of judges made up of

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<sup>138</sup>Stephen Conway, "The Great Mischief Complain'd Of": Reflections on the Misconduct of British Soldiers in the Revolutionary War," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (1990): 383. Fuel was necessary for both cooking and warmth, and New York experienced a dramatic shortage during the winter of 1779/1780.

<sup>139</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 275-276.

<sup>140</sup>Frederick Bernays Wiener, *Civilians under Military Justice : The British Practice since 1689, Especially in North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 102-103.

prominent Loyalists: Superintendent Andrew Elliot, Deputy Superintendent David Matthew, and Assistant Magistrate Peter Dubois. The court had jurisdiction over all cases worth up to £10.<sup>141</sup> James Robertson established three more Courts of Police in 1780 upon his appointment as the Royal Governor. These courts never completely placated the civilians who demanded the restoration of full civil government, but their usefulness was clearly evident as the British government replicated them when they occupied Philadelphia and Charleston.<sup>142</sup>

Trade was the lifeblood of New York's economy. While the Prohibitory Act of 1775 permitted the colonies in rebellion to import goods from England, it prevented them from exporting to any ports within the empire. This effectively brought commerce to a standstill because without the revenues generated from the export business New York merchants did not have the capital or credit necessary to purchase imports. British military leaders in New York realized that reviving the local economy would play a critical role in supporting Britain's war effort. Not only was it a military necessity to keep the troops and inhabitants of the city provisioned, but fostering trade was the most effective way for British officials to demonstrate the benevolence and benefits of remaining within the empire. The most significant military concern, of course, was to prevent the newly restored trade from supplying the Patriots. On July 17, 1777 William Howe used his authority as a peace commissioner to grant permission to select New York merchants to carry on trade under strict regulations to curtail smuggling. Ship captains had to declare all cargo upon entering the port, provide certified manifests to local officials, and impound liquor, sugar, molasses, and salt at their own expense until the

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<sup>141</sup>Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, 2:413-414.

<sup>142</sup>McCowen, *The British Occupation of Charleston, 1780-82*, 13-42.

goods could be inspected. Any undeclared items were subject to seizure.<sup>143</sup> New York's trade with the empire rebounded rapidly. In 1777 a Hessian soldier stationed in New York, Johann Conrad Döhla, wrote "Their most important trade, however, is with England, to whom they send furs, naval supplies, and copper and receive in exchange all sorts of European wares."<sup>144</sup> Encouraged by these promising initial results the Carlisle Peace Commission suspended the Prohibitory Act for New York City in 1778. This led to an explosive growth in trade and restored prosperity to New York's loyal merchants. By May 1779 Major Baurmeister noted, "The amount of merchandise, the number of rich warehouses, the uninterrupted trade, and the coming and going of ships cannot be described vividly enough."<sup>145</sup>

Despite New York City's economic rebound, its tenuous position at the end of a 3,000 mile supply line, coupled with the plodding transportation across the Atlantic, led to times of severe shortages. Pattison wrote to Lieutenant General George Townshend, 4<sup>th</sup> Viscount Townshend and Master-General of the Ordnance from 1772 to 1782, about the arrival of a provisions fleet to New York City in January 1779, stating, "They came in two Days ago, and nothing could be more opportune, as there has not been a Barrel of Flour in the publick Store for some Weeks past, and the Oatmeal, which has been substituted in lieu of it for the Ammunition Bread, reduced to a trifling Quantity."<sup>146</sup> Although this might sound alarmist, Pattison's assessment of the food shortage has been

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<sup>143</sup>Barck Jr., *New York City During the War for Independence* , 123.

<sup>144</sup>Johann Conrad Döhla, *A Hessian Diary of the American Revolution*, ed. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), 28.

<sup>145</sup>Baurmeister, *Revolution in America*, 268.

<sup>146</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 1.

verified by the calculations of historian R. Arthur Bowler who estimated that New York City's ration supply was so severely depleted in January 1779 that the British had less than one week of reserves. Throughout the entire war there was only one other instance, during November 1780, in which New York City's storehouses were similarly barren.<sup>147</sup>

Commandant Pattison served as both enforcer and policymaker in the economic realm. Clearly the larger decisions about the Prohibitory Act were made above his level; however, his decisions to either enforce or flout them had substantial consequences for the local economy. This was especially true regarding the regulations on smuggling. Despite Commandant Pattison's official prohibitions against smuggling, and strict enforcement of his regulations to prevent the sale of gunpowder or weapons to the rebels, he permitted an illegal trade of salt to secure cattle and sheep for the city.<sup>148</sup> This so-called "London Trade" secured food for the city while providing Americans outside of British lines with a scarce vital preservative. Even Pattison's most vociferous civilian critics approved of this action. Judge Thomas Jones supported the smuggling arguing that as long as no military supplies were sent to the rebels the trade actually hurt them by draining their specie reserves while securing an abundance of fresh provisions for the city.<sup>149</sup>

When it came to economic activity within New York, Commandant Pattison ruled supreme. He regulated every form of commercial transaction. He fixed prices for house rents, firewood, flour, wagon rentals, ferry fares, dock charges, and a myriad of other

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<sup>147</sup>R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 265-267.

<sup>148</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 323.

<sup>149</sup>Jones, *History of New York During the Revolutionary War*, 2:13-14.

goods and services. He did this in an effort to stop the runaway inflation caused by wartime scarcity, hoarders, and a thriving black market. Pattison also used economic regulations as a way to keep order in the town. The most notable example of this was the requirement for pubs and distilleries to have licenses to operate in the city. Pattison limited the soldiers' and sailors' access to liquor by only issuing two hundred licenses.<sup>150</sup> The commandants regularly revoked these licenses from curators whose business practices were harmful to the good order and discipline of the garrison.

The final way in which Pattison profoundly influenced the quality of life within the city was to revive the civil vestry to provide relief to the poor. Commandant Robertson instituted this policy during his tenure by creating a vestry of nineteen men, representing all of the wards of the city, to disburse public funds. With no civil government to levy taxes, Robertson had to secure other funding sources. He decided to use the rent paid by Loyalists living in Patriot homes in addition to the licensing fees for ferries, markets, and liquor. He also created a lottery to support the program, and later commandants funneled all fines paid to the Court of Police into the program.<sup>151</sup> The vestry and its many funding programs proved to be tremendously successful and provided £65,000 of aid from 1778 through 1780. The commandants also allowed Loyalist refugees to live in abandoned rebel property for free in many instances. Later in the war when Governor Robertson decided to confiscate rebel property, he and the commandant sent the proceeds to the city funds, and the vestry was then responsible for dividing it up

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<sup>150</sup>James Pattison, "By James Pattison, Esq; Major-General of His Majesty's Forces, Commandant of New-York. &C. &C. &C. Proclamation," *New-York Gazette*, January 3, 1780.

<sup>151</sup>Robertson, *Twilight of British Rule*, 151, n6.

among impoverished refugees within the city with the approval of the governor or commandant. These confiscations all occurred under martial law.

Despite the numerous hardships endured by the inhabitants of New York during James Pattison's tenure as commandant, they overwhelmingly approved of his conduct. When the city volunteered to form the militia companies they noted Pattison's "wise and prudent regulations you have been pleased to establish for our welfare and security; and to assure you, that we consider them a certain earnest of your steady, just, honourable and happy administration" and were confident that he appreciated their "predicament, as citizens, to their necessary private duties and employment" and would therefore not abuse the militiamen by calling them out too regularly.<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

Major General James Pattison faced a host of bureaucratic, military, and political challenges as the Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York between July 5, 1779 and August 13, 1780. His hybrid civil-military responsibilities permitted him to showcase his military expertise while simultaneously demonstrating his goodwill towards the inhabitants of New York City. Pattison's unique position as commandant, coupled with his intrinsic leadership abilities, enabled him to mobilize the militia on an unprecedented scale.

The greatest bureaucratic challenge Pattison faced during his dual tenures as Commander of the Royal Artillery and Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York was that the Royal Artillery was not organizationally part of the British Army.

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<sup>152</sup> *New-York Gazette*, November 22, 1779, 2.



Therefore, as Commander of the Royal Artillery in North America, his administrative chain-of-command ran from the king through the Board of Ordnance, even though he was assigned to the army with the rank of brigadier general for the purpose of supporting the main army when it went on campaign. This placed Pattison in the precarious position of having two military bosses, the Commander-in-Chief of North America and the Board of Ordnance. When priorities between the CINC and the Board of Ordnance conflicted, Pattison usually sided with the CINC because he was physically closer, he offered better patronage once Sir Henry Clinton assumed the post, and the CINC provided Pattison with the resources he needed to accomplish his assigned missions.

Although Pattison became disillusioned with the Board of Ordnance and tried to resign his commission as Commandant of the Royal Artillery in America, the Board refused. However, this was fortunate because it was his command of the Royal Artillery at the British capture of Stony Point in June 1779 that permitted Pattison to demonstrate his professional and leadership qualities to Clinton. Impressed by his technical expertise and physical courage, Clinton appointed Pattison as the Commandant of the City and Garrison of New York.

Pattison's major success during his tenure as commandant was his mobilization of the militia during the danger posed in the winter of 1779 and 1780 when the harbors froze over and New York was open to a land assault. During that crisis 5,797 militiamen and volunteers mustered in defense of the city. Pattison's prudent policies and inspiring leadership clearly made the difference. Upon his return from the Charleston campaign Clinton publicly praised him writing, "The Zeal testified by the Inhabitants to oppose the Enemy, evince the Confidence and Esteem you have Merited from them, as well as a

Courage and Loyalty highly to be respected.”<sup>153</sup> There was only one successful large-scale rebel assault against the city during his command, namely Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee’s raid on Paulus Hook on August 19, 1779. Pattison promptly implemented new defensive measures including signals, fortifications, and troop realignments that prevented Major General William Alexander on two separate occasions, January 5<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> 1780 from catching the Staten Island garrison by surprise with a large force of 3,000 men. Once the attack began, Pattison rapidly ferried reinforcements across the Hudson River convincing Alexander to call off the assault.<sup>154</sup>

When it came to civil administration Pattison was not an innovator. Instead he largely continued programs and policies that his predecessors established. Lieutenant General James Robertson, the city’s first commandant following its conquest by British forces in 1776, deserves the credit for most of the programs designed to improve life in the city such as the collection of rents, lotteries, and imposition of fines which all went to the city’s vestries to provide poor and refugee relief. Nor did Pattison originate the Board of Police which served as a substitute for the royal courts under martial law. However, it was Pattison’s implementation of policy and utilization of the tools at his disposal that set him apart from his predecessors. He judiciously delegated authority to the Board of Police and Chamber of Commerce so prominent loyal inhabitants could help him formulate policy to meet the requirements of the larger war effort, the defense of the city, and the inhabitants’ rights. The community’s respect for Pattison came from his demonstrated “unwilling[ness] that [the] faintest shadow of Inattention to the Rights of a

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<sup>153</sup> Henry Clinton, "To the Citizens of New-York," *New York Gazette*, July 3, 1780, 3.

<sup>154</sup> *New York Gazette*, January 24, 1780, 2.

Citizen should appear during his Administration.”<sup>155</sup> The end result was a clear demonstration that reliance upon Loyalist militia for garrison duty, which released the British Army to conduct offensive operations, was a viable “northern strategy” as well as a “southern” one.

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<sup>155</sup>Pattison, *Official Letters of James Pattison*, 423.

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